

Irmeli Helin

Implication of Evidentiality in Translation

Abstract

Evidentiality is a grammatical and lexical means to express that the source of information is someone else than the sender of the message. But how does the translator detect the indirect information from the implications of the source text or does he or she even add these kinds of implications to the target text? A translation is always an interpretation of what has been said or written. Anyway, since a translation can also be understood as an aid to facilitate the correct interpretation by the target audience, an interpretive subjectivity is always present in reading or listening to translated texts. This paper looks at methods used by translators of German texts into Finnish to transfer evidential information.

1. Evidentiality and evidentials in German and Finnish

In this paper I want to discuss an interesting phenomenon I have observed when checking the translations of my students at the Department of Translation Studies in Kouvola when they translated German online news texts into Finnish. It is a fairly new perspective in my own research, which concerns evidentiality as a grammatical and lexical means for the speaker or writer to express that the source of information is someone else than the sender of the message him/herself. The usual assumption is that there is no grammatical means in the Finnish language to express evidentiality (Helin 2004: 13, 14), except, maybe, the potential, and in any case this mood has other modal functions as well. It can also be used by the speaker to express that he or she assumes that a certain fact is true, not only or not at all to imply that the information has been forwarded by someone else than the speaker.

A Man of Measure

Festschrift in Honour of Fred Karlsson, pp. 282–290

Briefly, a practical means in German to express evidentiality is to use the subjunctive in main clauses. It is a form of indirect speech, which often leaves the original speaker unknown. At the beginning of the last century, German grammarians expected this mood to perish, but contrary to this prediction, it seems to be becoming more and more usual in modern texts, especially in newspaper texts and, even more in online texts published by the newspapers. On the other hand, we must make a difference between *mood* as a grammatical means and *modality* as a semantic and even lexical means of expressing evidentiality. Certainly, in each language there is a method to express uncertainty or wish to exclude the speaker from the contents or implications of the utterance, even if grammatical evidentials are not very common (Boas 1911). In any case, *mood* often equates with *modality*. Frawley (1992: 386) especially gives the subjunctive mood of different languages as an example of a means of expressing hypothetical assumption or uncertainty.

2. Detecting and interpreting evidentiality

According to relevance theory (Gutt 1998: 43–48) there are two psychologically distinct modes of using language: descriptive and interpretive use. He notes that the claim of optimal relevance guides the recipient in identifying the speaker-intended context for a given utterance. The contextual information needed for the correct interpretation seems to be readily accessible. But the correct interpretation may need the acceptance by the recipient of a more remote source of information than the speaker or writer him/herself. If a grammatical means is available in the source language, such as German, what should the translator do to express the same mood, if no evidentials have been standardized in the target language? Or even more importantly, from the cognitive point of view, how does the translator detect the indirect information from the implications of the source text? Does he or she easily add these kinds of implications to the target text?

3. Tense and mood as evidentials

As I have already implied, the Finnish language has no actual mood to express evidentiality. How do the translators then formulate, in this case, the German subjunctive in their cognition to imply evidentiality in Finnish

as well? The potential is not too useful and the indicative would lose a distinctive part of the information value of the utterance.

According to Frawley (1992: 338) all languages appear to rely on a time line, even if some languages assign different values to different parts of the time line. The significance of the time line can also be interpreted by some languages in ways which clash with the way speakers of other languages think of the role of time in everyday life. As a universal, we could still claim that “time is an ordered scale of precedence and subsequence relative to a baseline. This minimal schematic is filled in differently in different systems, but the structural system of tense nonetheless obtains.” Comrie (1985) calls temporal constants handed down to the speakers of a certain language the *essential meanings* of tenses—a reflection of the essential immobility of the time line. On the other hand—and this is important for us here—the linguistic line is imprecise, even if it is inflexible. This imprecision allows gross units of time, which are sufficient to capture the temporal notions that speakers require (Frawley 1992: 338). The time line is a kind of rough schematization of temporal extent, sufficient to temporal use but also sufficiently underdifferentiated to be available for modal usage as well. In their cognition, speakers—and translators—may transform a tense referring to the remote past into a modality that does not reveal the source of information other than by implying that it comes from somebody other than the speaker. This we can see from the Finnish translations of German texts, thus confirming the theses of the Finnish past perfect being the mood to express evidentiality in addition to remote past on the actual time line.

4. Translating subjunctive into past perfect

I discovered that my students translating into Finnish use the past perfect when translating the German subjunctive in indirect or mediated speech to a remarkable extent, e.g.

- (1) German: *in denen er... gewesen sei*
Finnish: *joissa hän oli ollut...*
- (2) German: *... seien durchsucht worden*
Finnish: *... oli tutkittu*

So far I have not seen much research on the role of this tense as a mood except that of Kuiri (1984) and Pallaskallio (2003). Normally, the past perfect, being a tense with a low frequency (about 4% in different texts of different languages) is only mentioned as a tense situating both the event frame and the reference time prior to the tense locus (see Frawley 1992: 348). Now, especially in Finnish, this remoteness is obviously used by the speaker or writer to create an interval between the information and him or herself and to avoid responsibility towards the recipients regarding the contents of the information. This tense is or is becoming an evidential in Finnish, losing its temporal aspects and acquiring an increasing amount of modal function in speech and written texts (see Helin 2004.).

A translation is always an interpretation of what has been said or written. The ethics and working discipline of the translator and interpreter typically refer to the principle of faithfulness, of close resemblance to the original. In practice, according to Gutt (1997: 43–38), this resemblance seems to range from totally shared explicatures and implicatures to almost no common features at all. Since a translation can also be understood as a potential aid to facilitate the correct interpretation of the translated product by the target audience, we enter the realm of subjectivity here. This interpretive subjectivity is present in reading or listening to novels and poems, but in a translation it is present twice: first in the cognition of the translator when reading and analysing the text; then, again, during the reading process of the recipient while reading the translated text.

Modality always encodes the comparison of an expressed world with a reference world (see Frawley 1992: 387). In our case we must define these two against the world created by a translation. Is the modality maintained through the cognition of the translator when interpreting the original text, i.e. if the modality is already present in the source text, is it correctly transferred to the target text? The reference world, the world being referred to in speech or writing, is, according to Frawley (*ibid.*), the modal counterpart of the spatial and temporal reference point. Here, remoteness and direction enter the picture with epistemic value. There is a distance between the actual and non-actual world, which is a remote and maybe also a somehow hidden world with only implications about facts. Therefore the speaker may not want to commit himself totally to the proposition itself.

5. Results of analysis

Let us look at the methods used by translators of German texts into Finnish when transferring evidential information into the target language. What makes them process the original information as evidential and how do they interpret it? What are the implications in the source text which direct them to use evidentials in the target language? Are there cognitive rules for using certain grammatical or lexical tools to express evidentiality in the target text, even if it is not explicit in the source text? Can we detect and categorize them? Since modality also implies a reference world, an expressed world and some degree of remoteness between them, how do we differentiate between modality and evidentiality, or is such a distinction unnecessary? We can, anyway, consider modality as a deictic, subjective structure, which either surfaces in the realis vs. irrealis distinction or overlaps with tense, person, and specificity. (Frawley 1992: 380.) But this is not necessarily manifested in the same way in the source language and the target language. Could we find a double subjectivity here?

5.1 Tense

In my translation corpus there is a total of 18 translations of two German online newspaper texts concerning a corruption scandal at the police department of Berlin last year. The 55 sentences of the texts contained 32 different verb forms to be categorized as evidential, totalling 45 items and 313 translated forms. In addition to this there were 86 lexical items implying evidentiality.

German verb form	Finnish: Present tense	Past tense	Perfect	Past perfect	Potential	Condit.	Total
<i>Sollen</i> + inf./inf.perf. (13)	10 7%	39 28%	44 31%	39 28%	2 1%	7 5%	141
subjunctive (14)	24 17%	46 33%	29 20%	37 26%		5 4%	141
past perfect (5)		11 36%	1 3%	19 61%			31
Total (32)	34 11%	96 30%	74 24%	95 30%	2 1%	12 4%	313

Table 1.

As can be seen, a total of 26% of the German subjunctive forms had been translated into the Finnish past perfect and 4% into the Finnish conditional, thus showing uncertainty and implying that an information transfer is concerned, such that the speaker, in this case the translator, is not the source of the information. This is highly interesting, since this is a subjective solution of the translator; he or she has actually no need to exclude him/herself from the information, because the relationship between the translator and the recipient is non-existent, anyway. Additionally, 28% of the German *sollen + infinitive/infinitive perfect* occurrences had been translated into the Finnish past perfect, and 5% into the Finnish conditional, which strengthens the role change of this tense towards a mood. That the high percentage of instances of the past perfect is a subjective solution of the translators is confirmed by the fact that the German past perfect (31 instances) has only been translated into the Finnish corresponding verb form in 61% of the cases, 36% having been translated into the present tense and 3% into the past tense.

5.2 Passive and active forms

Passive forms are also considered to move the speaker outside the utterance and thus to distance him/her ideologically from responsibility for the information source. In the German texts there were 10 passive constructions, 8 of which were without any further contextual evidentials. In addition, there were 2 passive forms in the German subjunctive perfect.

Active vs. Passive	Passive in Finnish target texts	Active in Finnish target texts	Total
Passive in German source texts	21	3	24
Active in German source texts	34	254	288
Total	55	257	312

Table 2.

Since the Finnish passive is also an important way of expressing evidentiality, I analysed the translations to see how many German active forms had been translated into Finnish passive and vice versa. As we can see, 34 out of 288 German active forms were translated into Finnish passive, but only 3 of the 24 German passives were translated Finnish active forms.

5.3 Lexical evidentiality in translations

Finnish translators also emphasized the evidentiality of the German utterance by translating the German active form of *sollen* with a Finnish passive form in 12% of the cases. Furthermore, we can see that several Finnish verbs meaning assumption, argument, uncertainty or doubt, stand for the German *sollen* constructions, showing that the translator subjectively adds the aspect of evidentiality to this German auxiliary modal verb, which cannot be connected with such meanings without special contexts. Other lexical items have also been used to correspond to this verbal structure, such as the Finnish words meaning probably, up to, according to, certainly, hearsay.

If we go back to Table 1 and examine further the German verb constructions with *sollen*, we see that in 28% of the cases it was translated into the Finnish past perfect, and in 31% of the cases into the Finnish perfect (see Pallaskallio 2003), even if the source text does not grammatically give any implications to this effect, nor is this way of translating such structures especially taught to language learners. The Finnish verb form is thus not selected because of past references but because of the evidentiality of the German utterance. All my analysis hitherto seems to imply that the Finnish past perfect is really tending towards modality and evidentiality from its marginal and not particularly old position of expressing the remote past. Using it, the speaker confirms to the recipient that he or she is not responsible for the information contents but the source must be sought elsewhere.

6. Conclusions

Optimality is always aimed at in language usage, together with one possible use for each grammatical form in the language. Furthermore, it is easier to express uncertainty, assumptions etc. by syntax than by lexis, where polysemy is more of a problem. This might be the reason why the German subjunctive has not perished, contrary to the predictions of the grammarians, as pointed out at the beginning of this paper, but blossoms anew in our days of multimedia, and, it seems, more often in online news texts than in printed newspapers. Maybe the Finnish past perfect is experiencing a similar renewal, by acquiring the role of evidential in our language, which currently lacks this grammatical verb form. In today's

information flow, publishers and journalists need a way to transmit information without always having to take responsibility for the contents themselves. Otherwise, they would continuously face the danger of a lawsuit because of the messages they have forwarded to the public through the media they are working for.

As to translation, in our case translation from German into Finnish, at least the young generation of translators, all too often to be ignored, seem to subjectively choose the Finnish past perfect to express evidentiality in their target texts. They use this tool to translate German subjunctive forms and constructions with the auxiliary *sollen*, but they use it even if the source text does not show any corresponding form. This seems to confirm the thesis of the change of the function of the Finnish past perfect from a tense form into a mood.

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Contact information:

Irmeli Helin
Department of Translation Studies
University of Helsinki
irmeli(dot)helin(at)helsinki(dot)fi
<http://www.rosetta.helsinki.fi>