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Strategies for Translating from Finnish into German and vice versa

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Abstract

This article is a summary of some experiences from my daily work as a translator, whose job it is to translate mainly from Finnish, a non-Indo-European language, into German, an Indo-European language, and sometimes also vice versa. A translator working with this language pair is confronted with several structural and cultural problems which are discussed in the following article.

1 Introduction

Finnish is one of the very few languages in Europe which do not belong to the family of Indo-European languages. In its grammatical structures the Finnish language is quite different for instance from the Germanic languages. In Finnish, there is no grammatical gender and the third person singular pronoun *hän* corresponds to both *he* and *she*. Finnish is a synthetic and agglutinative language: it uses suffixes to express grammatical relations and also to derive new words. There are only few prepositions and there is no definite or indefinite article.

When translating from Finnish into German or English or vice versa one has to take these characteristic features into account. When subtitling movies or TV-series from English – these are not dubbed – sentences like “he loves her, but she doesn’t love him”, require the translator to choose different strategies from just using the simple personal pronouns, because this would be resulting in a meaningless sentence *Hän rakastaa häntä, mutta hän ei rakasta häntä*.

Of course there are means of disambiguation which can be used in such situations. When translating juridical texts from Finnish into an Indo-European language for instance you will be sometimes confronted with a special problem: the original text is referring to a person in a way that his or her sex cannot be inferred. However, the translator has to choose equivalents in the target language which are either masculine or feminine.

The use of nouns is only one example of a problem which occurs when translating from Finnish into an Indo-European language. Also choosing the appropriate article may cause problems.

Beside of such structural problems which are caused by the structure of the language there are culture-specific features which have to be taken into account. Finnish has a polite form of addressing people like the German pronoun “*Sie*”, but in today’s communication it has become rather obsolete. Hotel guests and bank customers are addressed by the personal

using the colloquial pronoun *sinä* (*du* in German). Technical instructions, advertisements as well as help texts and commands in computer software mainly use the second person singular pronoun.

On the other hand Finns consider it as correct to keep a distance to other people. In advertisements published by Finnish companies you will rarely find sentences like “we can offer you...” which are considered to be obtrusive. Finns prefer to read advertisements written by using the third person forms (“The company XY offers its customers...”) or similar constructions.

Finland is a member of the European Union since 1995 and the recent accession of Estonia and Hungary (both Estonian and Hungarian languages are also non-Indo-European languages and are related to Finnish) will result in a considerable demand for people who are aware of the structural and culture-specific problems which can arise in translating between these non-Indo-European and Indo-European languages.

2 Characteristic features of the Finnish language

Finnish belongs to the family of Finno-Ugric languages. In Europe members of this family are: Estonian, Hungarian, Sámi (the language of the Lapps). Like these related languages, Finnish is a synthetic language with an agglutinative morphology, in other words: instead of grammatical “help words” like prepositions, pronouns or articles, the Finnish language mainly uses suffixes, which are connected to the stem of the word. For instance: *talo* (stem) = ‘house’, *talossa* (-*ssa*-ending = inessive case) = ‘in the house’; *talossani* (stem + *-ssa* + *-ni* = possessive suffix) = ‘in my house’; *taloistani* (stem *talo* + *i* = plural morpheme + *-sta*-ending = elative case + *-si* = possessive suffix of the second-person singular) = ‘out of your houses’.

Finnish has an abundance of cases that tend to baffle foreigners. There are at least 15 cases and nearly each one of them has its own ending. On the other hand it must be admitted that within this group there are six local cases (like the ones mentioned above) to express mainly local relations, for which German or English or another Indo-European language would use prepositional constructions.

The amount of different endings or derivative suffixes which can be combined with nominal or verbal stems is huge, e.g.: *suuri* = ‘big’ > *suurehkoillakin* (‘also with quite big ones’) = *suure-* (stem) + *-hko* (‘quite’) + *-i* (plural morpheme) + *-lla* (adessive case = ‘with/at something’) + *-kin* = ‘also’. One more example with a verbal stem: *heittää* = ‘throw’ > *heittelitpä* (‘you did throw frequently!’) > *heitt-* (stem) + *-el* (kind of action: frequentative) + *-i* (past tense) + *-tte* (ending of the second-person plural) + *-pä* (modal particle for strengthening the statement). The order in which these different endings are connected to the stem, is by no means arbitrary, in other words: there is a strict hierarchy between these endings. The ending *-kin* (‘also’) for instance always stands at the very end of the word.

One of the most typical features of the Finnish language is the possibility to produce thousands of different forms from a given root word by adding suffixes to it. For instance, nouns can be linked with approximately 2,000 different forms. Verbs can be conjugated and modified in about 10,000 different ways if one takes nominal derivatives from verbs also into account. Because compound words may contain a lot of information, the Finnish language does not need strict syntactic rules for combining words to sentences. Consequently, the position of the different phrases in the sentence is relatively free – compared for instance with English.

One special feature of Finnish is the so-called consonant gradation, which means that many morphemes have two forms: a strong one and a weak one, depending for instance on the case. One example: *kyky* ‘ability’; *kykyä* = case partitive (*kyky-* = strong stem + partitive ending *-ä*); *kyvyllä* (*kyvy* = weak stem + adessive ending *-llä* = ‘with the ability’.)

One more interesting feature in Finnish is the vowel harmony. According to this phenomenon, for instance, the endings of the cases inessive or elative may be *-ssa* respectively *-sta* (if the stem contains vowels like *a, o, u*) or they may be *-ssä* respectively *-stä* (after vowels like *e, i, y, ä, ö*). By the same rule the ending of the case adessive has either take the form *-lla* (as in the example *suurehkoillakin*) or *-llä* (as in the word *kyvyllä*).

Consequently, there is not only a huge number of different morphemes in the Finnish language which can be combined to one word, but due to the consonant gradation and the vowel harmony many morphemes can appear in two different forms. I would have thought that this feature would make Finnish a very difficult language for machine translation, but a colleague told me the opposite was true:¹ the computer programs for machine translation are specially designed for the parsing of complex morpheme chains. Much more difficult for them are languages like English, where one word (for instance *can* or *like*) may be a noun, a verb, an adjective, etc. Finnish is easier than English, because it is more regular. The morphological complexity problem has been solved, and there are already excellent parsers available.

Instead of subordinate clauses Finnish often uses so-called clause equivalents: *Tiedän, että siellä keitetään viinaa* > *Tiedän siellä keitettävän viinaa* = ‘I know that the people there are distilling booze’. This Finnish sentence contains the morpheme combination *keite + ttä + vä + n* (the stem is from the verb *keittää* ‘to cook, distil’), a clause equivalent which makes it possible to change a complex sentence consisting of a main clause and a subordinate clause into one main clause only. Clause equivalents are thus an important means, of making the sentence more economical and they can help to avoid long and complex sentences. On the other hand, they should be used moderately: normally not more than one clause equivalent per sentence.

One of the most astonishing features of the Finnish language – from the viewpoint of a foreigner – is the complete lack of grammatical gender. Finnish has only one pronoun *hän* for the third-person singular (for ‘he’ or ‘she’), which can refer to both a male and a female person. Consequently the possessive pronoun is identical for both genders (*hänen* = ‘his’ or ‘her’) as are the different case forms of the pronoun (*hänet* = accusative case, *häntä* = partitive case; ‘him’ or ‘her’ etc.).

Finnish *nomina agentis* (agents) are constructed by using the derivative suffix *-ja/jä*. For instance: *opettaja* ‘teacher’ (the verbal stem is *opetta-* = ‘teach’) or *näyttelijä* ‘actor/actress’ (the verbal stem is *näyttele-* = ‘to act’). These words are gender-neutral and can refer to both males and females. Thus the Finnish language doesn’t face such problems as the German language, where it is widely seen as a requirement of “political correctness” to always use both female and male forms: *Studentinnen und Studenten* respectively *Student-/innen* or sometimes also by using a capital I, the so-called “Binnen-I”, e.g. *StudentInnen*.

In former times efforts were made to introduce a derivative suffix (*-tar/tär*) into Finnish – probably under the influence of nearby Indo-European languages like Swedish or German – to construct female names of professions: *opettaja* > *opettajatar* ‘teacher (fem.)’, *näyttelijätär* ‘actress’. But today these forms are considered old-fashioned or obsolete. The suffix *-tar/tär* is actually quite old; it appears in the *Kalevala*, the national epic of the Finns, in names for female spirits, for instance *Ilmatar*, an elementary spirit of the air (derived from the word *ilma* ‘air’ + *-tar*).

In some situations, Finnish also still needs to express gender. For instance at the end of every year Finns choose the sportsman and the sportswoman of the year. In this case Finnish may use compound words, in which the first component expresses the sex: *miesurheilija*

¹ Andrew Chesterman, information given per e-mail on September 16th 2005. – Kimmo Koskeniemi from the Department of General Linguistics (University of Helsinki) developed in his PhD (see References) a two-level morphology parser that has now been used on many languages, not just Finnish.

‘sportsman’ (translated into German word-by-word: ‘Mannsportler’; *mies* = ‘man’) and *naisurheilija* ‘sportswoman’ (translated into German word-by-word: ‘Frausportler’; *nainen* [stem *naise-*] = ‘woman’). The very conservative wing of the Lutheran Church in Finland still refuses to accept women as priests, and this creates the need to make the distinction between a *pappi* ‘priest (normally a man)’ and a *naispappi*, ‘female priest’.

The normal word for ‘friend’ in Finnish is *ystävä* and it can refer to a girl or a boy, a woman or a man. But if you ask an eighteen-year-old whether he has a girlfriend or not, one should use the compound *tyttöystävä* (made up from the components *tyttö* ‘girl’ and *ystävä* ‘friend’ just like the English *girlfriend*). Or the other way around (if you are going to ask a girl) the crucial word would be *poikaystävä* (*poika* = ‘boy’) like the English *boyfriend*.

Let me mention one more specific feature of the Finnish language: Finnish normally has no articles. The category of definiteness and indefiniteness may be expressed by using the cases nominative or partitive (with the subject) respectively accusative or partitive (with the object). During the past decades, colloquial Finnish has developed different ways of using some words like articles. For instance the numeral *yksi* ‘one’ > *yks mies* = ‘a man (informal style)’ or the pronoun *se* (which in noncolloquial speech refers only to animals and objects, but not to persons) > *se mies* = ‘that man (informal style)’.

3 The influence of these specific features of Finnish in translating

Which implications do the above-mentioned specific features have on the translation process? Let me first say something about translations of literature from German into Finnish. The German history of literature knows many authors who love to construct very long and complex sentences. One example is Thomas Mann. The average number of words per sentence in his huge novel *Doctor Faustus* (in the original version) is 31! Other examples are Hermann Broch and Robert Musil or, from the more contemporary literature, W. G. Sebald. In Finnish literature, long and complicated sentences are not very typical. I can recall only one Finnish author, who had an inclination to construct very long sentences: Volter Kilpi and his opus magnum *Alastalon salissa*, which is generally regarded as untranslatable. (However, Thomas Warburton successfully translated *Alastalon salissa* into Swedish.)

When translating a German novel containing many complex sentences into Finnish, one may use clause equivalents to reduce the number of subordinate clauses. Many Finnish translators actually use this strategy. Some time ago Tero Vilkesalo, a student of mine, examined the Finnish translation of the biography *Mozart*, which was written by the German author Wolfgang Hildesheimer. This book was translated into Finnish by Seppo Heikinheimo and his wife Päivi (Seppo Heikinheimo was a quite famous music critic). When comparing the original (the source text ST) with the translation (the target text TT) my student discovered that the original syntactical structures had nearly always been transformed into very similar Finnish structures. One short example:

ST: Den größten Wert legte er auf das Lob jener, die er selbst hochschätzte, aber das waren wahrhaftig nicht viele, genau genommen war es nur Haydn, der einzige Zeitgenosse, den Mozart bewunderte. (19)

TT: Suurimmassa arvossa hän piti niiden ylistystä, joita hän itse arvosti, mutta tällaisia henkilöitä oli todella vähän, tarkkaan ottaen vain Haydn, ainoa aikalainen, jota hän ihaili. (22–23)

The Finnish sentence is patterned exactly like the German one. Both sentences contain five commas within quite a short sequence. It would have been easily possible to replace at least one subordinate clause by a clause equivalent, for instance, at the very end of the sentence: “...*Haydn, ainoa Mozartin ihaillema aikalainen*” (‘Haydn, the only contemporary Mozart admired’).

Vilkesalo had examined the Finnish translation under the aspect of foreignizing – of allowing the features of the source language to influence the language of the target text – in the sense of how it was described by the German Romantic philosopher and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher i.e. : to “bend” the language of the translation as far possible towards that of the original. In other words, my student was of the opinion that the translators aimed at preserving the syntactic structures of the source text in loyalty to the author – but at the cost of Finnish sentences becoming relatively long and not very reader-friendly.

I could imagine another explanation. Seppo Heikinheimo and his wife may be called semi-professional translators. The fact that clause equivalents do not really occur in their translation could also be due to interference. It may be possible, that they translated the German sentences quite mechanically and thus transferred the German constructions straight into the Finnish translation.

The fact that there are virtually no articles in Finnish normally does not cause unnecessary problems for the translator. As a native speaker of German, I have no problems in translating Finnish sentences into German and using the appropriate articles in the right places. But for my Finnish students, the use of the right article (definite/indefinite or the so-called null-article) in German sentences is quite a difficult matter, because their mother tongue does not provide them with a profound understanding of an article system. But this fact is, of course, more a problem of language didactics rather than of translation (science).

On the other hand, the complete lack of a gender system in Finnish causes quite a lot of problems in translating. The translators of German or English novels must pay special attention to passages in the book, where personal pronouns like the German *er* ‘he’ and *sie* ‘she’ occur quite often. To give a very simple example: A sentence like “He loves her, but she doesn’t love him” cannot be translated into Finnish just by using the corresponding pronouns, since Finnish has got only one word for *he* and *she* (*hän*) and the result of a word-by-word-translation would be meaningless: “*Hän rakastaa häntä, mutta hän ei rakasta häntä*”.

In cases like this the translators could use different means of disambiguation. For instance they may use the proper names of the persons in the novel (*Mister Marcy* or *Miss Marble*) or proforms like *mies* (‘the man’) and *nainen* (‘the woman’) or similar words which fit into the context. (In her presentation at the MuTra 2005 conference in Saarbrücken, Professor Kinga Klauudy from Budapest mentioned some examples from translations into Hungarian, which also has only one pronoun for the third-person singular). Sometimes the translator may use also demonstrative pronouns to clarify the reference.

One could believe that professional translators who are trained to translate literature from German or English are quite familiar with these strategies. But from time to time critical reviews of translated literature in Finland point out that the excessive use of the pronoun *hän* may confuse the reader: “Which person is the narrator talking about right now?” The translator has fallen into the “trap of the third-person singular pronoun”.

I would tend to explain such false steps by a fact which is mentioned by Hans G. Hönig (1997: 55): A text which is taken out of the realms of real communication and is projected into the reality of the translator, is amplified under the subjective eyes of the latter when scrutinized closely. Naturally the translator gets an overall view of the relationships between the characters in the novel, but it may be difficult for him/her to take the position of the reader, who looks at the text for the first time and normally catches only a short glimpse by glancing over the lines. If the sentences contain too many of these uniform *hän* pronouns, the reader will easily be disoriented.

The above-mentioned strategy I would like to call depronominization similar to the term “dépronominisation” introduced by Michel Ballard (2004: 38). This depronominization can be regarded as a type of explicitation of the referent – or as a change

of explicitness; see for instance Andrew Chesterman (1997: 108-109).² This strategy could also be applied – mutatis mutandis – when translating from one Indo-European language into another, for instance when translating from English (a language with a vestigial natural gender system) into French or German, which have a fully developed system of grammatical gender. Here an example from a novel of Thomas Hardy quoted by Ballard (2004: 38)

ST: Between eleven and twelve the garden gate clicked, and she lifted her eyes to the window. //

TT: Entre onze heures midi, la barrière du jardin cliqueta et Rhonda leva les yeux vers la fenêtre.

The French translator decided to replace the pronoun *she* by the Christian name of the person in question, because in the French sentence the close-by feminine word *la barrière* would otherwise disturb the reader. (In Finnish this situation would be different, because the pronoun *hän*, which would be the normal equivalent for the *she* in the sentence above, refers to persons only.)

I would like to quote the beginning of the short story *Der Andere* by Bernhard Schlink (from the book *Liebesfluchten*) in the German original (a), in the Finnish translation by Oili Suominen (b), and in a literal translation of the Finnish text into English (c) by myself. I have emphasized the words with depronominization in bold face type:

- a) Wenige Monate nach seiner Pensionierung starb seine Frau. Sie hatte Krebs, nicht mehr zu operieren oder sonst zu behandeln, und er hatte sie zu Hause gepflegt. Als sie tot war und er sich nicht mehr um ihr Essen, ihre Notdurft und ihren wundgelegenen Körper kümmern musste, musste er sich um das Begräbnis kümmern, um Rechnungen und Versicherungen und darum, dass die Kinder bekamen, was sie ihnen zgedacht hatte. Er musste ihre Kleider reinigen lassen und ihre Wäsche waschen, ihre Schuhe putzen und alles in Kartons packen. Ihre beste Freundin, Inhaberin eines Secondhandladens, holte die Kartons ab; sie hatte seiner Frau versprochen, dass die edle Garderobe von schönen Frauen getragen würde.
- b) Pari kuukautta sen jälkeen kun hän oli jäänyt eläkkeelle hänen vaimonsa kuoli. Vaimolla oli syöpä, jota ei enää voinut leikata eikä lääkittää, ja hän oli hoitanut potilasta kotona. Kun vaimo oli kuollut eikä hänen enää tarvinnut huolehtia tämän syömisestä, muista tarpeista eikä laihtuneen ruumiin makuuhaavoista, oli huolehdittava hautajaisista, laskuista ja vakuutuksista ja katsottava että lapset saivat sen mitä vaimo oli halunnut heille jättää. Hänen oli viettävä vaimon vaatteet pesulaan ja pestävä alusvaatteet, hoidettava kengät ja pakattava kaikki laatikkoihin. Vaimon paras ystävätär, jolla oli käytettyjen vaatteiden kauppa, kävi hakemassa laatikot; ystävätär oli luvannut hänen vaimolleen, että tämän tyylikkääät vaatteet päätyisivät kauniiden naisten ylle.
- c) Some months after he had retired his wife died. His wife [literally: the wife] had cancer which could not be operated or treated, and he had nursed the patient at home. When his wife [literally: the wife] was dead and he didn't have care for her [literally: demonstrative pronoun] meals any longer, for the other needs and for the bedsores on the thin body, he had to take care of the funeral, the bills and the insurances, and he had to make sure that the children got the part his wife [literally: the wife] had wanted to leave for them. He had to bring his wife's [literally: the wife's] clothes to the laundry and wash the underwear, clean the shoes and pack them into boxes. His wife's [literally: the wife's] best friend [female form], who owned a second-hand shop, came to pick up the boxes; the friend [female form] had made a promise to his wife that the elegant clothes that she had owned would be worn by beautiful women.

It can be seen that depronominization of the German pronoun *sie* occurs in the translation several times. Mainly the pronoun was replaced by the noun *vaimo* ('wife') and once by the noun *potilas* ('patient'), and in one sentence the possessive pronoun *ihr* (respectively *ihre*, *ihren*) was replaced by the demonstrative pronoun *tämän*. The last

² Chesterman makes a distinction between syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic strategies. The strategy of explicitation belongs to the latter ones.

pronoun *sie* in the quotation above (source text a) doesn't refer to the dead wife, but to a (female) friend of hers, and the Finnish text uses the explicitation *ystävätär* ('friend, female').

(This example with the word *ystävätär* shows that in this case the translator was forced to use the old-fashioned suffix *-tar/tär* for female persons – which was necessary, because the widower soon finds out that his wife actually also had a male friend (Finnish *ystävä*), a secret lover.)

Oili Suominen is a very experienced translator of German novels and her decisions have to be accepted, because if a short text passage contains a lot of pronouns like *er* and *sie*, at least some of them have to be replaced by other words. But let us read a little bit more from Schlink's short story, again the source text under (A), the Finnish translation under (B) and the literal translation of the Finnish text into English under (C):

- A) Auch wenn es sich bei alledem um Verrichtungen handelte, die ihm ungewohnt waren, war ihm doch so vertraut, im Haus geschäftig zu sein, während aus ihrem Krankenzimmer kein Laut drang, dass er immer wieder das Gefühl hatte, er müsse nur die Treppe hinaufsteigen, die Tür öffnen und könne sich auf ein Wort, einen kurzen Bericht, eine Frage zu ihr ans Bett setzen. Dann traf ihn das Bewusstsein, dass sie tot war, wie ein Schlag. Oft ging es ihm auch so, wenn er telefonierte. Er lehnte neben dem Telefon an der Wand zwischen Küche und Wohnzimmer, ganz normal, sprach über Normales, fühlte sich normal, und dann fiel ihm ein, dass sie tot war, und er konnte nicht weiterreden und musste auflegen.
- B) Vaikka kaikki nuo työt olivat hänelle outoja, hän oli vaimon sairastaessa kumminkin tottunut puuhailemaan hiljaisessa talossa, ja nytkin hänestä aina välillä tuntui, että kunhan hän vain kapuusi portaat yläkertaan ja avaisi oven, hän voisi istahtaa vaimonsa sängylle vaihtaakseen muutaman sanan, kertoakseen tai kysäistäkseen jotakin. Mutta samassa hän kuin iskuna vasten kasvoja tajusikin että vaimo oli kuollut. Samoin kävi joskus kun hän puhui puhelimessa. Hän nojasi tapansa mukaan seinään keittiön ja olohuoneen välissä, puhui aivan tavallisista asioista, hänelle oli aivan tavanomainen olo, ja sitten hän tajusi että vaimo oli kuollut eikä hän enää pystynyt jatkamaan vaan oli pakko lopettaa puhelu.
- C) Although all this work was strange to him, he got used to be busy in the quiet house, and even now he still felt that if he just would rise up the steps and open the door he could sit down on the bed of his wife, change some words with her, tell her or ask her something. But in the same moment he realized like a blow into his face that his wife [literally: the wife] was dead. The same happened sometimes when he was speaking on the phone. He leaned against the wall between the kitchen and the living room as he used to do, spoke about quite normal things, had a quite normal feeling, and then he realized that his wife [literally: the wife] was dead and he was not able to continue and he had to hang up.

When recognizing the fact, that several *sie* pronouns were replaced by *vaimo* ('wife') in this second passage the bilingual reader starts to feel a little bit uncomfortable. The passage above is not a standard third-person narration but rather a piece of writing where, despite the intriguing use of the third-person reference, the narrative point of view is that of the male protagonist *er* ('he'). In other words: the narrator is able to look inside the mind of his protagonist. The German original conveys the impression that we are hearing the inner voice of the character reflecting on his thoughts and feelings after the death of his wife. The narrator uses a narrative technique called free indirect discourse (FID) which conveys a character's thoughts as they are thought by the character himself but which, nevertheless, maintains the third-person reference and also the past tense of narration.

This narrative technique is signalled by using expressions of inner movement (like "*traf ihn das Bewusstsein ... wie ein Schlag*" and "*fiel ihm ein, dass...*" / "*he realized...*" or "*it came into his mind...*"). Together with the so-called inner monologue the free indirect discourse is

an important means in modern literature which has the tendency to psychologize and to reflect the mental discourse of the characters.³

Due to the replacement of the pronouns in the Finnish translation the point of view, the sight into the mind of the protagonist, is modified to some degree; it is not so close any more, and the text has moved towards standard narration. The sudden realization “*sie ist tot*” (‘she is dead’) seems to be closer to the real “thought act” of the character than the statement “his wife was dead”.

In Finnish translations the compulsory replacement of the pronouns leads inevitably to difficulties in transferring the narratological structure, in this case the free indirect discourse.⁴ In this respect we are dealing with an objective translation problem according to the definition by Christiane Nord (1991: 151). Anyone translating fictional texts into Finnish – texts with free indirect discourse combined with several different pronouns – will face this problem, despite the translator’s competence and in spite of the technical conditions of work.

The lack of a gender system in Finnish is not only a source of problems for the translators of literature. It may also cause difficulties for translators of many other types of texts, namely when translating from Finnish into another language. Quite often Finnish source texts tell the reader something to about someone without giving any information on whether this person is male or female. Last spring I had to translate the headline *Kimi on saanut uuden tiedottajan* (‘Kimi has got a new PR manager’) into German. (‘Kimi’ referred to Kimi Räikkönen, the Finnish Formula One driver.) My “raw version” of this sentence was “Kimi hat einen neuen PR-Manager”. (The noun *tiedottaja* is a derivation from the verb *tiedottaa* ‘to inform’). After a search on the Internet I found out that the manager’s name was Anna Sorainen. Thus the more equivalent German translation was “Kimi hat eine neue PR-Managerin”.

But not everyone is to be found on the Internet. The situation gets more complicated, if the Christian name of the person is not mentioned in the text or if it is abbreviated or not transparent in terms of biological sex. This may be the case with exotic names. An image search in Google may be helpful. Sometimes I ask my Finnish wife for help (“Can you please tell me, whether this person mentioned here is male or female?”) but in most cases I already know the answer (“Just on the basis of the text you cannot tell.”). Then I normally feel angry about the “strange Finnish language”, which allows speaking about someone without giving a clue to the reader whether it is a man or a woman. My wife’s standard answer in this situation is: “For us Finns this is not important! In Finland we are emancipated.”

Some time ago I had to translate documents for a trial in a Finnish court. The papers stated *Todistaja vahvisti lausunnossaan, että...* and so on. My German version was “Der Zeuge hat in seiner Aussage bestätigt, dass...” (“The witness has confirmed in his statement that...” – The name of the witness was not mentioned). A few weeks later I had to translate more documents about the same court proceedings, and there it became obvious that the witness was a woman. The more adequate translation would have been “Die Zeugin hat in ihrer Aussage bestätigt, dass...”

³ Grammatically speaking the inner monologue corresponds to the direct discourse (example: He felt: “I have got it!”) while in the free indirect discourse the third-person form and the tense are preserved (“He felt that he had got it.”).

⁴ Tarja Rouhiainen from the University of Turku has dealt with this problem, as well as Ellen Valle (see References). I am grateful to my colleague Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov for directing my attention to this problem (as well as for the hint concerning Ballard). She has studied this phenomenon in translations from English into French, and her article “FID and Translational Progress: Comparing 18th-century and Recent Versions of Henry Fielding’s Novels in French” will soon be published in a publication series of the University of Tampere. – On a wider scale the problem of maintaining the narratological structure in translations, for instance the system of personal deixis, was examined by Levenston and Sonnenschein (1886).

Sometimes the translator really must make a phone call to the institution or organization in question and ask whether the person mentioned in the text is a man or a woman. But when working as a freelancer for a translation agency, the staff there does not like their freelancers to contact their clients directly. So instead of one phone call, it may be necessary to make several calls.

4 Differences in language conventions and culture

After 25 years of translating, I dare say that Finnish advertisement texts prefer to use more “impersonal” forms of address than for instance German.⁵ This observation corresponds with the general inclination of the Finns to keep some distance in their contacts with unknown people.

Thus Finnish companies do not use in their advertisements statements like “We offer you...” They prefer to say it in a more reserved way: “The company ABC Inc. offers its customers...”, as if a third party, for instance a journalist, would write an economic article about the company. The use of “personal” expressions like “we offer you” is easily considered to be obtrusive.

One strategy I use when translating Finnish advertisements into German is to add a little bit of “personal” touch to the text, because the Finnish source text would sound quite reserved and “dry” in the ears of their potential German customers.

If on the other hand the customer is addressed directly in Finnish advertisements, the informal form *sinä* (‘du’ in German) would be used. As in German and in many other Indo-European languages (except English), Finnish also has both a formal “you” (‘Sie’ in German) and a familiar “you” (‘du’ in German). But in Finland the formal address (*te*) is nowadays restricted to quite formal situations, for instance when addressing the president of the state or very old persons.

Thus customers of banks and hotels in Finland, as well as potential car buyers and politicians taking part in talk shows on TV, are nowadays nearly always addressed with the informal *sinä* (‘du’ in German). This development may be a cultural influence from Sweden, and in some way it would appear to be a paradox when considering the usual habit of the Finns to keep a certain social distance to other people.

In a brochure of the hotel chain Sokos Hotels one can read for instance: *Tutustu hotellin tiloihin ja palveluihin osoitteessa www.sokoshotels.fi!* In a word-by-word-translation into German this would be: “Schau dir die Zimmer und Leistungen des Hotels unter der Adresse www.sokoshotels.fi an!” But in the translation rendered for my customers, I automatically replace the Finnish informal “*sinä*” forms by the German formal “*Sie*” forms, as “*Sie*” is still “good style” in formal, noncolloquial German communication. Using “*du*” when “*Sie*” is appropriate would sound condescending or even insulting.

Moreover, Finnish directions for use consist of a type of text in which the informal address is nearly the one and only possible form. In German directions for use, assembly instructions and similar texts normally use the infinitives of the verbs: “Vor dem Öffnen des Geräts das Netzkabel ziehen. Die Schrauben lockern und den Deckel abnehmen...” In contexts like this, the Finnish language uses mainly the imperative of the second-person singular.

This is also the fact in modern computer technology and can be seen at a glance in Finnish computer journals and manuals. Most of the options and commands which occur on

⁵ I myself have not collected any statistical data about this, but my observation is confirmed by the results of the licentiate thesis of Erja Tenhonen-Lightfoot (1992), in which she has compared Finnish and German advertising materials of banks and telecommunication companies.

the screen of computers are imperative forms of the second-person singular – as they are in English. While German uses infinitives, the corresponding forms in Finnish and in English are imperatives in the second-person singular: *Speichern / Save / Tallenna* or *Öffnen / Open / Avaa* or *Fenster schließen / Close window / Sulje ikkuna* etc. The corresponding formal forms of address (actually imperative forms of the second person plural in Finnish) – *Tallentakaa / Avaakaa / Sulkekaa* – are not used in contexts like this.

When translating computer texts from German into Finnish or vice versa one must take this into account. Some years ago my wife and I translated computer texts from German into Finnish for a medium-sized manufacturer of hardware and software whose European headquarters was situated in southern Germany. When we received the proofs we noticed that our translation was only a part of the whole job; many texts were translated into Finnish by other translators (obviously they had been living in Germany for quite a while), and they had used all these odd-sounding formal forms like *Tallentakaa* etc. We tried to explain to the customer that these forms must be changed, but the outcome of our intervention was that two German managers of the company – without any knowledge of the Finnish language and its conventions – wanted *us* to change our informal forms in accordance with the rest of the text! We refused to do this and lost a customer, but for me it felt even worse to realize that the overall image of the translator as a competent interlingual and intercultural mediator still needs to be improved.

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