

**AN INSIDER'S VIEW ON TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSFER IN
INTERNATIONAL NEWS COMMUNICATION:**

AN ENGLISH-FINNISH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. The paper aims to provide a practical response to the questions of how and why English influences Finnish via international news communication from Reuters to the Finnish News Agency. The theoretical part of the study, which consists of news translation theory and situational factors of news work, uses the 'gatekeeping' metaphor to describe the various operations used for controlling foreign news flow. The empirical part of the analysis focuses on the textual: transformation analysis looks at the operations journalists use for altering certain source text information in the target text, and transfer analysis considers what is retained or borrowed. The results show that news production from English into Finnish involves an extensive combination of transformation and transfer decisions exercised by individual journalists governed by various situational factors that their organisation and surrounding culture impose upon them.

1. Introduction

In 1998 the Finnish Research Centre for Domestic Languages (*Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus*) published an article claiming that the Finnish language was losing its linguistic autonomy and edging toward "a linguistic situation nobody wants". It proposed that a special language planning programme (*kielipoliittinen ohjelma*) should be implemented to alleviate the problem. The programme stressed the media responsibility in this process:

A large proportion of media language is translated. Therefore the media have a marked effect on the way new concepts are presented. The media effect is also greater today than earlier because they can nowadays reach the entire language community [...] Thus, one has a right to demand that journalists working in newspapers, the radio and television have a very a good knowledge of Finnish and can use the right linguistic forms for different situations [...] (*Kielikello* 1998:8)

Later in the article, the media were given a few suggestions on how high linguistic standards could be maintained:

Translation skills also have to be improved, for it is necessary that people representing a language of limited diffusion should be able to compare ways of expressing ideas in two languages:

translation skills is what makes it possible for us to keep languages separate from each other. Only those who are familiar with the characteristics of another language are able to avoid such source language influence which harms the weaker target language (interference). (*Kielikello* 1998:12)

There are probably several of ways of responding to the growing concern over the fading autonomy of the Finnish language at the receiving end of foreign news flow, depending on the angle or direction from which the phenomenon is looked at. This paper, which derives mostly from my own professional experience in international news journalism at Reuters (8/99 – 7/2000) and the Finnish News Agency (10/98 – 5/99), was motivated by the need to provide a practical, insider response from the point of view of a professional news translator. Even if I as a journalist agree that good translation skills are a high priority for journalists working in a country such as Finland where most foreign input has to be based on foreign news despatches (Vuorinen 1996: 97), I believe the question should not be so much how to fence it off as **how** and **why** this medium serves as a vehicle for linguistic influence. In fact, only by first **contextualising** the processes by which the international, Finnish-language news is formed can we understand what has actually been transferred and why (cf. Bo Petterson 1999).

To provide a starting point for tackling these questions, I set three primary goals for my Master's thesis (Hursti 2000): to find out (1) what are the processes by which international news is transformed from English into Finnish; (2) how do the various situational factors at play in these processes affect the Finnish news language; and (3) what kinds of attitudes do journalists responsible for producing foreign news have toward cross-linguistic influence? To be able to provide consistent answers, I decided to focus on international news production as it is done between one single chain, Reuters, as a leading international news agency, and the Finnish News Agency (FNA), as "the most important single agenda setter for the whole system of daily foreign news transmission" in Finland (Kivikuru 1990:328). The material for the textual analysis, 14 Reuters source texts and 14 FNA target texts, was also exclusively culled from these two agencies, which further helped to focus the scope of my thesis. The present paper includes some of the highlights of my key findings.

2. Transediting and gatekeeping: two faces of the same coin

An international news story is submitted to numerous text processing stages between spotting an event in a foreign country and the final news product being aired to Finnish consumers. These stages, which involve both editing and translation, a combination of which has been termed 'transediting' (Stetting 1989), have often been bundled under one single term: 'gatekeeping' (see e.g. White 1950). Gatekeeping, on the other hand, is based almost solely on selection. To make the meaning of all these terms clearer, I will define each of them separately.

Editing: that part of the news production process which involves transforming the language or the structure of the original message by using such text-surgical methods as deletion, addition, substitution and reorganization (cf. Vuorinen 1996).

Translation: that part of the news production process which involves translating into another language those parts of the original message that are considered newsworthy in the receiving

cultural environment.

Transediting: the composite term used to refer to work done in the realm of ‘practical texts’, such as news items, in which both of the processes, editing and translating, are not only very much present but also equally important and closely intertwined (cf. ‘news translation’; Vuorinen 1995, 1996).

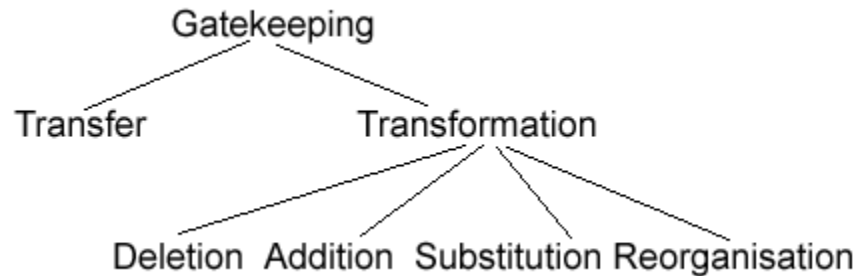


Figure 1. The basic gatekeeping operations at work in source text processing and translation (Vuorinen 1996: 197)

Gatekeeping: Introduced to communication research in the 1950s (see e.g. White 1950), this term has traditionally been used to refer to the function news journalists play at different levels of the ‘news assembly line’ (Bell 1991) whether they be international or national to control the amount of news flow from gate to gate (as gatekeepers) by **selecting** those stories or story details that they consider newsworthy to be passed on to the next gate.

Selection: What the entire gatekeeping process is based on. Selection can be roughly divided into two categories: story selection and detail selection. Story selection is the first and most important gatekeeping operation (see e.g. Vuorinen 1996:202) because it determines the bounds of the subsequent textual and linguistic selection decisions.

Based on the above, translation and editing can be seen as an integral part of the gatekeeping process. In fact, the composite work of transediting and gatekeeping could be seen as two faces of the same coin. For example, when an FNA journalist decides to manipulate a string of information in a Reuters’ story to produce a Finnish-language story (e.g. reorganise, delete or substitute it), s/he is making a translatorial (transeditorial) decision and **transforming** the text; this is a gatekeeping operation. Similarly, if s/he were to make the opposite decision to retain the string of information intact, this could be seen as a **transfer** operation (Figure 1). Later in this paper, I will focus on delineating between these two main operations.

But, as the latest research strongly suggests, using the gatekeeping metaphor only for defining phenomena at the textual level of news production does not suffice for a well-rounded analysis of the process. The various situational factors affecting the journalist’s decisions (cf. e.g. Shoemaker 1991; Vuorinen 1995:169), which I have classified as the individual, the organisational and the cultural factors, should also be looked at.

3. Situational factors and gatekeeping

Based on my own journalistic experience, an individual journalist's importance as regards what event and which pieces of it are reported forward to the next gate depends greatly on (1) how much first-hand knowledge s/he has about the event to be reported, and (2) at what stage of the gatekeeping process s/he is assigned to the event/story or decides to follow it up. In line with this, Shoemaker (1991:21), citing Whitney and Becker (1982), remarks that at the later stages of gatekeeping, a news journalist's "selections [are] more influenced by what the wire services sent him than by his own opinions." This contention seems to be very applicable to the FNA's foreign desk where journalists **cannot go beyond** what has already been said in the wire material, e.g., to ask further questions of the people involved in the event or to explore other news angles from the national point of view (cf. Chibnall 1977:7).

An individual journalist's gatekeeping decisions are also governed by certain demands that the news journalism organisation imposes on its news workers. One of the most important is news style, which, at least in the western agencies such as Reuters and the FNA, represents a kind of standard form of language (cf. Vehmas-Lehto 1989). This characteristic is particularly common in international news language. As its basic function is to inform people about events taking place in other cultures, it is only natural that its language should be readable (in the sense of comprehensible and clear) and neutral (cf. Stenwall 1997:27). These two requirements also correlate with another very important situational factor affecting international news production, i.e., the requirement of speed. By using simple clause structures, familiar words instead of unfamiliar ones and by striving for compactness, the foreign journalist is able to save effort, and what is even more important (to the editor), s/he is able to save time.

Every news organisation is ultimately embedded in a certain cultural environment, which imposes constraints on its behaviour (Vuorinen 1996). Avoiding at least the most irritating 'culture bumps' and pitfalls requires that communication across cultures should proceed as smoothly as possible, without too many hitches and breakdowns (Leppihalme 1997). In the case of news translation this has meant that the original stories dealing with international events and actions have to be written with clarity and universality. *Reuters' Style Guide* states:

[W]e must use simple and straightforward English both for subscribers reading economic news on screen terminals under great pressure and for media subscribers [such as the FNA] of which a majority translate our service into a language other than English. (*Reuters Style Guide*, Introduction)

What this means, in practice, is that as an international agency Reuters cannot pack its news copy with too culture-specific allusions or metaphors even if it wanted to but instead has to produce news material that is **culturally acceptable** (Schudson 1989:278) to all. Only by doing this can it make sure that all of the informative and linguistic nuances in its stories are accessible to foreign news translators regardless of their cultural background. However, at the receiving, national end of the process, the selection criteria will not only depend on which stories or story details are culturally acceptable but also on whether they are culturally **desirable**. This explains why journalists working at the national end only select a limited number of all the 'culturally

acceptable' international stories at their disposal.

4. Transformation analysis

The following analysis is an abridged version of the textual analysis of 14 FNA target texts in my Master's thesis (Hursti 2000). While it examines the four major linguistic operations FNA journalists use to transform Reuters source texts, namely **reorganisation, deletion, addition** and **substitution** (cf. e.g. van Dijk 1988, Fujii 1988, Bell 1991, Vuorinen 1995), it also aspires to find out why and how these specific alterations were made.

Reorganisation: Even before transforming any information in the TT, the FNA journalist has to evaluate the ST to decide how to (re-)structure it. This process often involves answering such questions as "Is the ST structure transferrable as such?", "Should I refocus the information in the lead paragraph?", "Could some of the details be presented elsewhere in the story?" etc. Solving these problems properly is very important, because they will set the tone for the other transformation operations.

A very common procedure in news translation, reorganisation was found in all 14 texts, at all textual levels, ranging from the precision permutation of individual lexical items to extensive revamps of information at wider textual levels. While some of the decisions to reorganize the TTs were no doubt due to differences between the Finnish and English languages, most of them were motivated by more conscious decisions to refocus the TTs to better serve the needs of the receiving audience.

Deletion: The decision to delete parts of the STs was the most frequently used gatekeeping operation in the TTs. It occurred in all 14 texts, ranging from complete paragraph omissions to omissions of sentences to omissions of individual lexical items. On average, about 60 percent of the source material was deleted as a result of the gatekeeping process. For example, to show accuracy, balance and specialist knowledge, Reuters frequently back up their claims with as many facts as feasible, which often results in long, sometimes paragraph-forming sentences (cf. Vuorinen 1996). To get rid of these details, the FNA needs to make deletions within paragraphs (Vuorinen 1996:203). Such elements as references to sources, time and place adverbials, and other types of information deemed unnecessary are often deleted. (ST/TT number precedes every example below.)

Sourcing:

ST12: ...that would allow NATO to take action if European monitors in Kosovo were endangered, *diplomats said*.

TT12: ..., joka antaisi Natolle luvan ryhtyä sotilastoimiin, jos Kosovossa olevien Etyjin valvojen turvallisuus vaarantuu.

While every Reuters story "*must be clearly and explicitly sourced...to enable subscribers to form their own judgement of its credibility and to protect [Reuters'] reputation if a story is challenged*" (*Reuters Style Guide*, S9; emphasis added), it is normally enough for the FNA to simply indicate

that the story was initiated by Reuters.

Time adverbials:

ST7: ...Olara Otunnu, a former Ugandan diplomat who was appointed *in September 1997* as U.N....special representative for children...

TT7: ...Olara Otunnu, joka toimii YK:n lasten erityislähettiläänä...

Place adverbials:

ST10: ...Ferdinand Hammer, 77, a retired foundry supervisor in *Sterling Heights*, Michigan, be deported...

TT10: Michiganissa eläkepäiviään viettävä Ferdinand Hammer, 77, saa lähteä...

Non-finite clauses providing further information:

ST2: The iceberg, *named A-38*, measures 92 miles long...

TT2: Jääkimpale on noin 150 kilometriä pitkä...

Addition: Sometimes FNA journalists add information to the ST that is not in the TT (cf. Bell 1991:78). This is often done in cases where it is felt that a Reuters story seems to take, for instance, the understanding of a certain detail or background information for granted (ST/TT6: "Microsoft corp..." becomes "*Ohjelmistojätti* Microsoft"/'Software giant Microsoft'). FNA uses additions rather sparingly, only in a few instances per text (cf. Vuorinen 1996:209; Stetting 1989:371). Examples:

Culture-specific additions (in added italics below) explain a detail or a concept in the ST that has a unique reference in the source culture:

ST13: But after the auction of bottles at Christie's in London...

TT13: Christie's-*huutokauppakamari* ['auction house'] kauppasi torstaina 24 samppanjapulloa

Event-specific additions include such details as "time, place, the course of events, the characteristics of objects and actors, the type and manner of action, etc." (Vuorinen 1996:210):

ST8: Accompanying Clark in his second meeting with Milosevic in less than a week was Chris Hill, the U.S. diplomat trying to craft...

TT8: ...neuvottelussa Clarkilla oli mukanaan *Yhdysvaltain Makedonian -lähettiläs* ['United States ambassador to Macedonia'] Chris Hill, joka pyrkii aikaansaamaan...

Background additions consist of extensive information lumps, e.g. entire paragraphs, based on

other sources endowing the story with further or recycled information (cf. Vuorinen 1996):

ST13: (...)

TT13: *Suomalainen liikemies Peter Fryckman on vaatinut lastia itselleen, koska hänen sukulaisensa oli tilannut siitä osan* [‘Finnish businessman Peter Fryckman has demanded that the cargo be given to him because one of its subscribers was a relative of his’].

Substitution: Substitution is the one gatekeeping operation that almost invariably involves other types of gatekeeping operations as well, such as textual reorganisation, addition and deletion. A selection of those substitution operations that FNA journalists consciously use for attaining certain **pre-meditated** textual and journalistic functions seems to generate the most interesting results. Some of those categories were as follows (emphasis added):

Making details less specific:

ST1: Typhoon Zeb ... is blamed for the death of 43 people...

TT1: Zebiksi nimetty hirmumyrsky ... vaati yli 40 ihmisen hengen...

Refocusing information (e.g, to make the lead paragraph culturally more desirable for the receiving audience):

ST11: *The Galileo spacecraft* has produced evidence showing there may be liquid oceans beneath the icy crusts of two of Jupiter’s moons, raising the possibility of life beyond earth. [3rd paragraph of ST]

TT11: *Kahden Jupiterin kuun jäisen kuoren alla* [‘Beneath the icy crusts of two of Jupiter’s moons’] saattaa olla nestemäisessä muodossa olevia valtameriä. Tähän viittaavat Galileo-avaruusluotaimen tekemät havainnot, joista kerrotaan keskiviikkona ilmestyneessä Nature-tiedelehdessä. [1st paragraph of TT]

Demetonymisation/depersonalisation:

ST5: *The defence ministers of Russia and Belarus* said on Friday they would beef up bilateral military ties...

TT5: *Venäjä ja Valko-Venäjä* suunnittelevat [‘Russia and Belarus are planning’] sotilaallisen yhteistyön tiivistämistä...

Due to the transformations done by the FNA of the Reuters dispatches, the final outer makeup of FNA copy is often that of rearrangement and change. However, a closer look reveals that some parts of the TT still seem to bear a close resemblance to their ST equivalents, as if they had been "transferred" from the ST to the TT in some way.

5. Transfer analysis

Transfer in language production can be divided into two categories: lexical borrowing and transfer of pattern (cf. Ringbom 1988:50):

(1) Lexical borrowing refers to **similarity of lexical items** between the ST and TT. In its purest form it is a complete language shift, i.e. "direct copying, transcribing, or transliterating of ST/SL units while adapting them to the phonological, graphological, or even morphological and grammatical systems of TL" (Toury 1979:226). It can be divided into short-term borrowing, which refers to loan words that have not yet been passed from one generation to the next, and long-term borrowing, which refers to words that have already done so and are thus firmly established in the language.

(2) Transfer of pattern, on the other hand, refers to **similarity of patterns** between the ST and the TT (Ringbom 1988:52; cf. Vuorinen 1996:197). In terms of grammar, it means that the TT clause or sentence structure is similar to the ST sentence structure.

This paper will not discuss transfer in quantitative terms but simply give a few examples each of both lexical borrowing and transfer of pattern (for a more detailed analysis, see Hursti 2000). The following extract contains at least two examples of long-term lexical borrowing (emphases added):

TT3: Useimmat israelilaiset toivovat huippukokouksesta sopimusta

Jerusalem, 16. 10. (STT-Reuters)

Useimmat israelilaiset toivoivat Lähi-idän *huippukokouksen* osanottajien pääsevän sopimukseen rauhanneuvotteluiden jatkamisesta...Israelilaisten ja palestiinalaisten edustajat neuvottelevat parhaillaan siitä, miten Lähi-idän *rauhanprosessia* voitaisiin jatkaa.

The compounds *huippukokous* 'summit meeting' and *rauhanprosessi* 'peace process' might be regarded as potential examples of (long-term) lexical transfer (note also the dictionary equivalence of the words *summit* and *huippu*). In the former case at least, transfer is probably due to decades of news transmission where this word has been used. What is interesting in the case of *rauhanprosessi* ('peace process') is that the ST does not actually include this word at all. The use of the Finnish word here indicates that *rauhanprosessi*, despite its comparatively recent introduction to Finnish, by now has a firmly established position in the Finnish lexis.

As for transfer of pattern, it is nominalisations, especially the types of nouns of action which Vehmas-Lehto (1989:163) refers to as *abstract clause structure* (clauses with abstract nouns of action in key positions) that seemed to be the one category most clearly manifested in the analysed target texts. Ending with the suffix *-minen* (or with its inflected forms with case endings), which leaves open the question of whether or not there is a human agent involved, they are often used when striving for compactness and freedom from bias. For example:

Naton itälaajentuminen vs. Nato's eastward expansion (ST/TT5);

Nato vaatii välitöntä vetäytymistä Kosovosta vs. NATO demands immediate Serb *pullout* from Kosovo, (ST/TT4).

Since these types of almost direct copying of an entire source text pattern are, in my experience, very common in news translation, where speed is of the essence, nominalisations are, in my opinion, typical examples of the kind of transfer of pattern news texts in general are subjected to.

As far as target awareness of transfer is concerned, my analysis suggests that it is those individual lexical items and nominalisations which do not have any particular function within the Finnish cultural system, i.e., which only assume meaning when used to refer to international phenomena such as *rauhanprosessi* or *huippukokous*, that a native Finn regards as potential examples of lexical transfer. Transfer of pattern may be less clearly recognized as a borrowing.

6. Global view on gatekeeping: selection, transformation and transfer

It is evident that international news communication, or any type of communication, can no longer be analysed merely as a matter of isolated news texts, but in a much broader sense, as a contextualisation of the entire news writing process. While this contextualisation should cover as much as possible from the context of the initiator to the context of the receiver of international news, it should also be practical for a given use. This should also be mirrored in any model(s) of

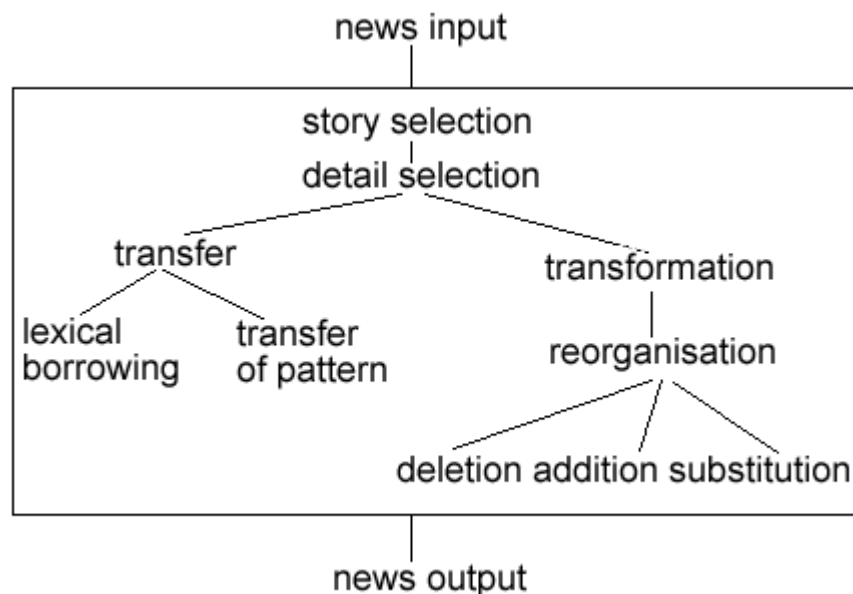


Figure 2. Gatekeeping in linear fashion within an individual gate (inside the square)

international news translation (Figure 2.). Though I may have taken a few false steps in this study, I feel that paying attention to the two opposing aspects of gatekeeping, transformation and

transfer, and hence aiming at a better contextualisation of the gatekeeping process and encouraging the use of the term 'transediting' to refer to news translation because it includes both the idea of translating and editing are justified and practical.

7. Conclusion

As pointed out at the outset of this paper, my starting point was the worry expressed in Finland concerning the powerful influence that translated news language exerts on Finnish — the fading autonomy of the Finnish language as it has been called. I see the situation from an insider viewpoint. But despite this angle, which might be thought to lead to a bias, it still seems fairly clear to me that there is no practical way of stopping the process or even slowing down the pace at which the process is taking place. As the distinguished Finnish author Paavo Haavikko so unequivocally put it in an interview with a Finnish daily newspaper recently (*Iltalehti* January 20, 2001, B8), "...English has overthrown Finnish... The attack on the Finnish language is without bounds, and it is not going to survive."

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