

Fine-tuning SI Quality Criteria: Could Speech Act Theory be of any Use?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at political rhetoric in the European Parliament, focusing on speech acts and the way they are conveyed by interpreters. Discourse in the European Parliament is a specific genre with speech acts constituting an integral rhetorical element of the genre. Following an analysis of an authentic corpus comprising more than 100 speeches in four languages, delivered in the European Parliament, the theoretical framework of the present chapter focuses on speech act theory, and the way it can be used to complement translation and interpreting theories in a close analysis of SI performances. The aim of the analysis has been to use authentic data in order to obtain some specific information that could be applied to interpreter training, as well as suggesting an approach for interpreter quality assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Observations from within the interpreters' booth in the European Parliament (EP) inspired the author to record and analyse parliamentary rhetoric and the way it is conveyed by interpreters working in the simultaneous mode (SI). The ultimate aim of this analysis has been to compile some tangible data relating to interpreting quality. The chapter focuses on the quality criteria of 'accuracy' and 'faithfulness'. While these two concepts tend to be taken as the obvious core elements of high standard interpreting (see the discussion of definitions of interpreting below), field work in meetings, and recordings made of SI in those meetings, will shed some light on the way accuracy and faithfulness are realised by professional interpreters. The more representative, and the more carefully designed an SI corpus is, the more reliable results can be obtained. Consequently, conclusions can be drawn relating to the quality targets that are set for interpreting.

A brief description of the real-life corpus underlying the analysis is followed by a short discussion of some key aspects of the theoretical framework and the methods of analysis that have been applied in studying speech acts that contain modals in English EP speeches. These are compared with the various SI solutions produced by interpreters working into Finnish, German and Swedish. The results of the analysis are discussed with a view to their applicability to interpreter training.

2. THE EP CORPUS

The real-life corpus was recorded in the European Parliament in the late 1990s. The research design was made 'in the field', while working in the plenary sessions of the EP. The plenary was selected as the speech context in order for the study to be representative in describing interpreting in a normal, routine-like setting that is familiar to both the speakers and the interpreters. The aim of the research design was to collect a corpus focusing on some specific characteristics of the EP genre that would illustrate issues relating to SI quality. Consequently, the corpus covers a range of topics that were considered to be representative of a typical part-session of the EP plenary session. The debates were selected on the basis of the topic as well as the type of debate they represent in order to contain samples of different levels of textual difficulty. The corpus includes: debates on six different reports; oral questions to the Commission; speeches on the Northern Ireland peace process; oral questions to the Council (on human rights); Question Time to the Council; and Rule 47 debates on topical and urgent subjects of major importance. Altogether there are 120 original speeches that were held in English, Finnish, German or Swedish, and their SI versions into these languages.

The plenary part-sessions are typically a forum for monologues. The corpus at hand has only a few instances of spontaneous dialogue, or comments relating to something that was going on in the House at the time of the recording. Furthermore, it is possible to see from the video recordings that the majority of the speeches are read from a script. Where there is no visible script, it is still obvious that the speech has been carefully planned. The manner in which the speeches are delivered is most probably due to the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, according to which Members have limited speaking times, ranging typically from one minute up to five minutes.

A speech can be defined in a number of ways. For the purposes of the present chapter, we have followed the definition by Martin Reisigl: “A speech is a structured verbal chain of *coherent speech acts* uttered on a special social occasion for a specific purpose by a single person, and addressed to a more or less specific audience” (2008: 243 [my italics]). Reisigl (*ibid.*) continues by characterising the rhetoric of political speeches as follows:

They are rarely produced ad hoc or spontaneously, and even the sporadic ex tempore speeches are never improvisations out of nothing, but compositions based on speech patterns and set pieces that have entered the linguistic and episodic memory of the speaker.

The characterisation by Reisigl highlights the elements that are relevant for the analysis at hand; a) the reference to a special social occasion (here: the EP part-session of the plenary session); b) a specific purpose (here: presenting the stance of a political group); c) addressed to a specific audience (here: the audience in the House, as well as the media). The second part of the definition is equally relevant for the present study, as it aims at highlighting some frequent elements of the EP genre that could be called ‘speech patterns’ or ‘set pieces’.

The corpus in quantitative terms is described in Table 1 below.

<i>Languages</i>	<i>No. of speeches</i>	<i>No. of words</i>	<i>No. of sentences</i>
English	54	22,100	950
Finnish	11	2,700	200
German	44	16,200	800
Swedish	11	2,100	120
Total	120	43,100	2,070

TABLE 1. The total number of speeches, words and sentences in each language

The research design aimed at avoiding the problem of the singularity of interpreter performances. As each speech has been interpreted into three languages, on site, on five different dates, as part of the normal EP routine, we can assume that this solution has reduced the problem of inter-individual and intra-individual fluctuations in attentiveness, in cognitive factors and in linguistic competence. In terms of quantitative data regarding the corpus, it was not possible to count the exact number of interpreters in the corpus; the figure 30 is a rough estimate.

3. DEFINITIONS OF INTERPRETING

Conference interpreting has been defined in a number of ways (cf. Pöchhacker 2004). Pöchhacker's formulation is based on the theoretical view according to which Translation is the umbrella term, and Interpreting is a special form of translation: "Interpreting is a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language" (*ibid.*: 11). Regarding the fidelity and accuracy of interpreting, Pöchhacker writes: "The most widely acknowledged demand on an interpretation is that it should be faithful to the original" (*ibid.*: 141).

The same demand is expressed on the EP home pages, and their description of the interpreter's work: "The main task of the European Parliament's interpreters is to render orally the speeches given by MEPs *faithfully* and in real time into all the official languages" [my italics]. Under the heading of "Interpreting in the European Parliament" we find a similar job description: "The interpreter's job is to ensure that speeches delivered in one of the official languages of the European Union are *accurately* rendered into the other official languages" [my italics].

Furthermore, on the same pages, under the heading "To be or not to be ... an interpreter", we read the following:

As the range of subjects covered in parliamentary debates is almost unlimited, the interpreter is required to have a solid general knowledge and expertise in all areas of EU activity. Being familiar with an MEP's political opinions can help an interpreter *grasp the speaker's intentions* beyond mere words [my italics]¹.

The theoretical approach and definition by Pöchhacker, representing the scholarly approach on one hand, and the employer's pragmatic approach of the EU administration on the other hand, have provided the framework for the present analysis of the EP speeches. Thus, in the subsequent discussion, the focus will be

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/multilingualism/interpretation_en.htm> retrieved on 16th September, 2010.

on the three quality-related aspects of SI: 1) interpreters are expected to convey a faithful transmission of the original message; 2) the message should be rendered accurately; and 3) interpreters are expected to ‘grasp the speaker’s intention beyond mere words,’ as indicated in the EP definition above as well as definitions of interpreting quality in the literature (Pöchhacker 2004: 131-144).

The questions we wish to pose here are: How do we characterise an ‘accurate’ and ‘faithful’ SI transmission of the original message? How does an interpreter ‘grasp the speaker’s intention’?

According to the EP text above, being familiar with a politician’s opinions can help. Yet, there are 736 Members in the European Parliament from 27 Member States expressing the views of their political groups. Other regular speakers include the President and the Vice-Presidents of the EP, President-in-Office of the Council as well as members of the Commission. Basic training has taught interpreters that being familiar with the MEPs’ political opinions, as well as acquiring ‘a solid general knowledge and expertise in all areas of EU activity’ will help them to understand and convey some of the recurring features of the discourse. Such elements provide the interpreter with the frame for understanding the message². However, the interpreter may need other kinds of tools and tactics for coping with the task of transmitting ‘the original message’ both ‘accurately’ and ‘faithfully’ to the audience. We suggest that language philosophy may provide some aid for interpreters for understanding the EP political rhetoric.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

4.1. *EP speeches – a genre in their own right*

A thorough analysis of the recorded and transcribed material suggested that discourse in the EP might be characterised as a genre in its own right³. This characterisation is based on the approach of Jean-Michel Adam (1999), according to whom genres can be characterised by textual properties that are the consequence of linguistic interaction in a speech situation involving an institution, participants, a place and time as well as the constraints of a given language (or several languages). Genres are the result of socio-discursive practices acquired by text

2 A frame “is a body of knowledge that is evoked in order to provide an inferential base for the understanding of an utterance [...]” (Levinson 1983: 281).

3 Authors differ in their use of the concept ‘genre’. Douglas Biber uses the term ‘genre’ “to refer to categorizations assigned on the basis of external criteria [...] ‘text type’ to refer to groupings of texts that are similar with respect to their linguistic form” (1988: 70). Michael Stubbs (1996: 11) does not distinguish between ‘text type’ and ‘genre’, but uses the concepts as alternative terms.

producers (*ibid.*: 36). Thus, with the help of the appropriate tools of analysis in identifying recurring textual features, the interpreter's understanding of the EP genre will be enhanced, enabling the interpreter to 'grasp the speaker's intention'. In his discussion of the concept of 'genre', Michael Stubbs (1996) states what interpreters learn through practice: "The important point is [...] knowing how the [genre] can make a difference to the way in which it is interpreted" (*ibid.*: 12). Therefore, a close analysis of both the language and content of the EP speeches may foreground some key elements of the EP genre that will help interpreter trainers help trainees in their effort to reach an acceptable level of SI accuracy.

4.2. Rhetorical analysis of EP speeches

New rhetoric as developed by Chaïm Perelman provides a fruitful angle for studying speeches addressed to a specific audience. Perelman (1982: vii-viii) has asked the following questions:

- I. By what processes do we reason about values?
- II. What does justification of values "look like" in actual, verbal discourse?

Values are at the core of political language. In the European Parliament, values are an integral element of the majority of speeches. After all, the debates are about EU legislation that reflects the norms and values of our society. Values, and the way they are expressed, can be analysed with the help of rhetorical theories as well as speech act theory.

4.3. Why speech act theory?

Philosophers and grammarians have long acknowledged the role of speech acts in their explanation of verbal mood and sentential types (Vanderveken & Kubo 2001: 1). Barry Smith (1990: 29) explains that according to Aristotle, only sentences in which there is truth or falsity are the subject of a philosopher's investigation; all the other kinds of sentences belong to the study of rhetoric or poetry. According to Smith, the first philosopher to have fought consciously and explicitly against the Aristotelian conception seems to have been Thomas Reid, who saw that there are, in addition to judgments, also other types of sentences permitting theoretical treatment. As early as 1894 he considered that "The principles of the art of language are to be found in a just analysis of the various species of sentences" (cited by Smith 1990: 29-61). According to Smith, Reid called such sentences 'social operations' or 'social acts', because they have a necessary directness towards some other person. The Munich phenomenologist Adolf Reinach (1883-1917) is viewed by Smith as the first philosopher to have worked out the systematic theory of the phenomena of promising, questioning, requesting,

commanding, accusing, etc., which he calls 'social acts' (*ibid.*: 29-61). An analysis of the corpus at hand made it evident that the phenomena of promising, questioning, requesting, commanding, accusing, etc., are extremely frequent in the EP genre.

According to Vanderveken and Kubo (2001: 3), John Austin adopted the concepts: 'locution', the linguistic form; 'illocution', the declarative, interrogative and imperative sentence mood; and 'perlocution', the function that utterances carry in a specific situation. He discovered that utterances like "I request you to help me" are performative, and the illocutionary act is named by the main verb. In his discussion of speech act theory Armin Burkhardt (1990: 125) reports that it was further developed by John R. Searle (1969) and Herbert P. Grice (1989), and has become an important branch of contemporary theory of language.

Today, the concept 'speech act' crops up quite frequently in the literature on machine translation and corpus linguistics, where the focus is, for example, on naturally occurring data in a spoken corpus and cross-linguistic research. In fact, in the volume of critical approaches to the philosophy of Searle, Burkhardt (1990: 125), has come to the following conclusion:

[...] in the course of the three decades of its history, speech act theory has undergone a development from the Austinian pragmatic beginnings via different, more or less intentionalist approaches and Searle's "hybrid" conception to what might be called a (lexical) semantic view of speech acts. Here, I think, speech act theory has come to an end.

Robin Setton has incorporated the views of Austin, Searle and Grice in his model of Simultaneous Interpreting. For Setton, "the speech act in its strongest sense [is] an act performed by an utterance (a bet, promise, investiture, curse, etc.); in the wider sense used [...], [it is] an intentional utterance" (1999: 370). In the present study we have relied on the approach developed by Jerrold M. Sadock. In his invited comment on the articles by Vanderveken as well as by Cohen and Levesque (in Cohen *et al.* 1990), Sadock offers the following approach to speech acts: "[...] most of the things that we can do with words can be done by uttering any words, given the right context" (1990: 257). From a theoretical point of view, Sadock finds the speech act 'game' 'trivial', and speech act theory 'so open-ended' (*ibid.*: 258). For his own part, Sadock has sketched out a scheme for understanding the structure of and relationships among illocutionary acts (*ibid.*: 268). His scheme is based on the three fundamental powers that combine in human language: the ability to represent the world, the ability to alter society, and the ability to express emotions. Sadock reports having studied "the distribution of sentence types, and the formal indicators thereof, in a number of different languages" (*ibid.*: 261). Together with his colleague he found that every language in their sample distinguished at least a declarative type, an interrogative type, and an imperative type. Sadock (1990: 267) has classified speech acts into three groups:

Dimension	Act type		
	<i>Assertion</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Request</i>
Represent	T	T or F	F
Oblige			
Speaker	accept p	—	—
Addressee	—*4	answer	cause p
Others	—	—	—
Express	belief	curiosity	desire

TABLE 2. The fundamental sentence-type division of most languages
(T = True; F = false; p = proposition) (Source: Sadock 1990: 267)

Sadock explains his table as follows: 1. The contrasts that the three act types display on the three dimensions [represent, oblige, express] are just about maximal; 2. The three classes of speech act correspond to natural but non obligatory associations of properties on the three levels; 3. The properties of each basic speech act are simple properties. Furthermore, concerning the expressive content of an utterance, the three most fundamental propositional attitudes are belief, curiosity, and desire. Following Sadock's theoretical analysis, we would argue that political rhetoric is to a large extent about beliefs, and the act of conveying these beliefs to an audience. In the light of the EP corpus, the speaker's intention is the desire to convince the audience of the speaker's beliefs, and, eventually, to change the world.

In a similar vein, Stubbs (1996: 200) discusses speech act theory as an element of his corpus analysis of the way speakers and writers express their stance towards the information that they are conveying. One of the aspects he analyses is the degree of reliability or authority speakers and writers mean it to have. Stubbs summarises his argumentation as follows: "Utterances express two things: propositional information, and also the speaker's/writer's attitude towards this information" (*ibid.*: 197). What Stubbs has termed as 'reliability' or 'authority' attached to a message is something that Perelman focuses on, too. The discussion below, together with the examples, will illustrate the frequency of certain types of speech act, as well as the crucial role of the speaker's stance for the meaning of the message.

This aspect of the present study relates to the question of the 'accuracy' and 'faithfulness' of the SI. One of the conclusions of our Ph.D. thesis (Vuorikoski 2004: 252) has been the following principle that we consider to be an important element controlling SI quality:

4 Sadock (1990: 267) explains this point as follows: "Different sorts of assertoric speech act place different burdens on the addressee. A response to a question in a court of law, for example, simply commits the speaker to the truth of his statement. It places no responsibilities upon the judge or jury to accept its veracity. A confession of guilt, on the other hand, more or less automatically counts as true for all parties concerned".

An essential element of interpreting is to allow the listener to formulate an interpretation of the target text message that corresponds to the one he would have formulated if he had been able to understand the original speech.

This general principle led us to narrow our analysis to some clearly specified elements of discourse. A comparison of the original speeches and their interpreted versions turned our attention to the following speech acts that contain a modal auxiliary, or a performative verb, or an expression, such as in the following sample of the various kinds of speech act that were identified in an original English speech:

- (1)
- | | |
|---|----------------|
| Therefore we welcome this report. ... | [support] |
| ... and congratulate the rapporteur ... | [appreciation] |
| But you should not underestimate... | [appeal] |
| ... broadcasters have to recognise ... | [request] |
| I personally believe ... | [belief] |
| I have to say ... | [hedge] |

Such phrases are an interesting element in the corpus, simply due to their frequency in the original speeches. Furthermore, such utterances seemed optimal data for a study aiming to take a close look at the quality criteria of ‘accuracy’ and ‘faithfulness’. Figure 1 focuses on the types of speech act that were studied for this chapter, describing their share in the English originals, and containing a modal auxiliary.

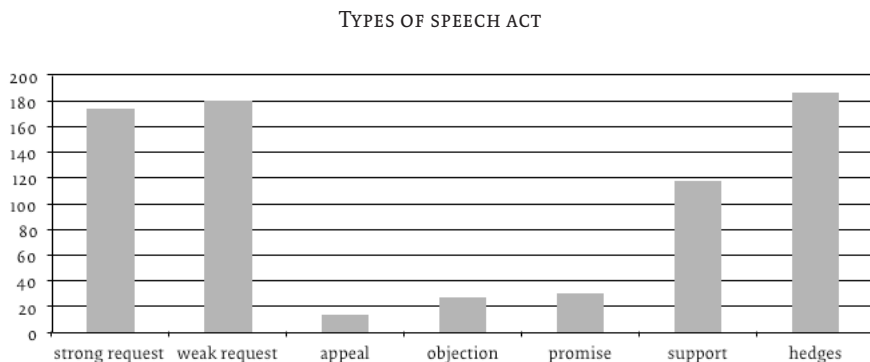


FIGURE 1. Share of the speech acts in the original English speeches

4.4. Requests

After a preliminary screening of all the speech acts in the 120 speeches, we decided to follow Sadock’s classification of three basic speech act types, limiting the

present study to an analysis of Requests. The Requests analysed here are speech acts that have variously been called ‘demands’ or ‘directives’, ‘exhortations’, ‘expressions of suggestion’ and ‘requests’. According to Sadock “Requests present a picture of the world as unrealized: they oblige the addressee to make that state of affairs true; and they express the speaker’s desire that this should be the case” (1990: 266). It is not difficult to find utterances in the EP speeches that fit this definition. The context, as well as the verb(s) being used, leave no questions in the mind of the addressee as to the speaker’s intention, as in the following example:

(2)
 This motion urges China to stop [...]

It calls on China to refrain [...]

and calls on both parties to [...]

You’re gonna have to get some order [...]⁵

Proportionately, the share of Requests in the corpus is relatively high, 14% of the total number of sentences.

Original speeches	No. of sentences	No. of Requests
English	950	153
Finnish	200	34
German	800	134
Swedish	120	21
Total	2,070	342

TABLE 3. Actual number of Requests in the original speeches

The example below illustrates Requests that contain values, as well as reflecting the speaker’s stance towards the information he is conveying; furthermore, they oblige the addressee to make that state of affairs true.

(3)
 Extract of a speech on antipersonnel mines:

All Member States have agreed bans and moratoria on APM exports. *The EU should go further and take action itself to ban the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of APMs. The Council should adopt a new joint action [...]*
 The CCW Convention *should include* provision for [...]
 The existing stocks *should be destroyed*.
 When it comes to Protocol 2 on land mines a statement *should be inserted [...]*
 Verification procedures *should be tightened* and all anti-handling devices *should be banned*.
 Anti-tank mines *must also be made* detectable.

5 This is one of the rare examples of spontaneous speech in the House; an MEP addresses the Speaker, requesting him to order the MEPs to be quiet.

Mr. President, *EU Member States must sign and ratify Protocol 4 [...]*
They should ban [...]
EU Member States should ban [...]
Existing stocks of [...] should be eradicated.[...]
The citizens of Europe and the developing world are crying out for change. *We should not disappoint them.*

A second reason for choosing the above speech as an example of what is here understood as Requests is the frequent use of two modal auxiliaries. The sample speech of 501 words contains the modal auxiliary ‘must’ twice, and ‘should’ 11 times, a frequency that is typical of the EP rhetoric.

A comparison of the originals with the SI renderings turned our attention to what appeared to be a non-systematic way of conveying the original modal verbs.

4.5. Modal auxiliaries

According to Sadock, “[...] the choice of the verb in a performative formula has a powerful influence on the effect of a contextualised utterance” (1990: 259). The Requests in the English originals that have been analysed here contain the modal auxiliaries indicating obligation or necessity (‘must’, ‘should’ and ‘ought’, and the quasi-modals ‘have got to’ and ‘have to’). Requests with ‘need to’ have been included in the analysis as well, since more often than not they were rendered with a modal auxiliary by the interpreters. (English original: [...] the need for us to work together – German SI [...] *zusammen arbeiten müssen*)⁶.

Lexically, Requests can be expressed in various ways, of course. It struck me as particularly interesting, however, to focus on requests with modals and quasi-modals, as they are very similar in form in English, German and Swedish; the form of these lexical items is totally different in Finnish, a non-Indo-European language, but the Finnish language has corresponding modal verbs that are used in the same way as the ones in English, German and Swedish. Thus, finding a corresponding lexical item is not a problem for the Finnish interpreter.

5. THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

Before entering into a description of the methodology of the present study, it is advisable to give some background information on the kind of data that will be

6 The analysis of the semantic meaning of the modals is based on a corpus study of English language modals by Jennifer Coates (1983). Another piece of research that has guided the present analysis of the modals is by Svenja Adolphs (2008). The German modal verbs have been analysed against Graefen and Liedke (2008) and Hentschel and Weydt (2003), and the Swedish ones against Svenska Akademiens grammatik 4, Satser och meningar. Nordstedts.

discussed here. Referring to Table 2 by Sadock, an additional specification from his article (1990: 263) may clarify his approach to speech acts; furthermore, this approach seemed to fit the method of analysis chosen for the data at hand.

I will suggest a position between those [of ...] in terms of the amount of structure that we find in the [Illocutionary Forces] of natural language. I would like to urge the view that the complete speech act has three separate, simultaneous functions: a representational function, an expressive function, and a social function. Taking these three dimensions as definitional of illocutionary acts gives us a classification that is at once truer to the grammatical facts of natural language and more elegant than what we find in existing decompositions.

An analysis of five debates on different themes held on different dates will illustrate some characteristics of Requests containing modals or quasi-modals. The speeches were delivered in English on five topics (Commission report on the application of EU law in Member States; a report on equal pay for equal work, and another one on EU regional funds; recorded on 13th February, 1996; and debates on the Intergovernmental Conference and UN Human Rights Commission meeting; recorded on 13th March, 1996). As indicated earlier, this chapter discusses Requests in the English originals, and the way they were conveyed by EP recruited professional interpreters into Finnish, German and Swedish.

5.1. Method of analysis

The first step was to listen to the original speeches, to transcribe them, and to carry out a text analysis within the adopted theoretical framework and method of analysis. The next step was to listen to the interpreters, and to align the Requests in the original English speeches with the interpreters' renditions. An example of this alignment is given in Table 4.

The next step was to analyse the degree of correspondence between the original Request and the SI versions. One characteristic to assess, relating to the accuracy and faithfulness of the SI renderings of the Requests, was the relative strength vs. weakness of the Requests. Of the sample of original English speeches studied here, more than one third of the Requests could be classified as strong, and about the same number as weak ones. A comparison of the originals with the SI versions, relating to the accuracy of the strength/weakness conveyed by the SI, showed the following trend: in nearly one half of the cases two out of three interpreters conveyed the same strength in their SI versions as was expressed in the original; in more than one fourth of the cases, only one of the three interpreters produced the same strength vs. weakness of the Request as the original; and in less than one fourth of the cases three out of three interpreters rendered the same strength as the original. Furthermore, in a small number of cases the Request was not conveyed at all.

English original	SI > Finnish, German, Swedish
we all need to focus	FI: meidän täytyy kiinnittää huomiota DE: wir sollten uns (...) konzentrieren SW: så måste man koncentrera
there ought to be	FI: meidän pitäisi kiinnittää (...) DE: sollte es von nun ab (...) SW: så måste man understryka (...)
our focus ought to be on (...)	FI: ---- DE: man sollte sich konzentrieren (...) SW: man tar inte hänsyn till (...)
.. ought to be (..)	FI: --- DE: Diese sollten (..) auf der T sein. SW: det här borde vara (..)

TABLE 4. Alignment of the Request with a modal in the English original speech, and the SI versions into Finnish, German and Swedish

The way such expressions are received naturally depends on both subjective and objective issues relating to the person that is analysing the material. In an ideal case, an evaluation of the SI performances, would be complemented by native speakers of the languages concerned carrying out a similar analysis.

Some SI renditions can be taken as interesting cases of the differences between spoken and written language, and the tendency of SI to move closer to the spoken end of the spoken-literate continuum, as observed by Shlesinger (1989).

(4)

We need action in a whole range of areas,
and strict application of existing law
at European and national level,
the training of lawyers in the area of equal pay,
reducing the length and the cost of legal proceedings,
greater involvement of women in pay negotiations,
and constantly drawing attention to pay disparities
by publishing statistics and organizing conferences.

The predicate of this lengthy sentence is 'need' ("We need action [...]"); thereafter, the speaker uses either nominalisations of verbs or *-ing* forms. Receiving this long list of items online, the interpreters chunk it into shorter units with modal auxiliaries (*müssen, täytyy, måste*)⁷, as can be seen in the transcription below:

⁷ In this context, 'müssen', 'täytyy' and 'måste' all have the same semantic meaning 'must'.

(5)

Original: We *need* action in a whole range of areas,

De: Es *muss* in dem ganzen Bereich ...

Fi: Me *tarvitsemme* toimenpiteitä

Sw: Vi *måste* gå vidare

Original: and strict application of existing law [at European and national level,]

De: Es *müssen* bestehende Gesätze ...

Fi: meidän *täytyy* toteuttaa ...

Sw: vi *måste* tillämpa lagstiftningen

Original: the training of lawyers in the area of equal pay,

De: Es *muss* gleiche Ausbildung ...

Fi: meidän *täytyy* myös kouluttaa ...

Sw: vi *måste* utbilda advokater

Original: reducing the length and the cost of legal proceedings,

De: ---

Fi: ---

Sw: vi *måste* göra det billigare att ...

Original: greater involvement of women in pay negotiations,

De: Es *muss* gleiche Entlohnung ...

Fi: ---

Sw: vi *måste* se till att ...

Original: and constantly drawing attention to pay disparities

De: Es *muss* Einbildung der Frauen ...

Fi: ja meidän *täytyy* jatkuvasti tutkia ...

Sw: ---

Original: by publishing statistics and organizing conferences.

De: und es *muss* statistische Arbeit ...

Fi: ---

Sw: och vi *måste* publicera ...

If we try to assess the effect of the original message on the audience listening to the English speech, and the effect of the SI versions by listening to SI, we tend to think that they would have the same effect on the addressees in spite of the difference in form. The syntax of the original text is that of a written text; in the spoken mode it is rendered using the syntax of spoken language⁸. Our overall assessment would be that the meaning of the stance of the speaker's request towards what he is saying has been faithfully conveyed by the interpreters in all those instances where there is an interpretation. (The omissions as well as some less accurate rendering of the original propositional content will not be discussed here).

Example 6 demonstrates a different kind of problem relating to an accurate and faithful rendering of the original request. Speakers will use certain rhetorical devices in order to give greater emphasis to what they are saying. A recurring device in the EP genre is repetition, particularly in the English speeches. It is obvious that there is a deliberate plan to use this device.

⁸ Such a statement would of course have to be verified by research into the characteristics of the syntactic structures of the spoken and written language of each of the languages in the corpus.

(6)

In particular, I want to speak against Amendment 207, being recommended by the Left in this House, proposing that Articles (b), 3(g), 90 and 100(a) be changed. Article 3(g) commits the European Union to a system of ensuring that competition in the internal market is not distorted. This is commendable. *It should not be changed.*

Article 90 commits the Union to public undertakings being subject to the rules on competition. This is essential: *it should not be changed.* Article 100 (a) lays down the procedures by which we shall establish the functioning of the internal market. This is necessary, it should be completed, *it should not be changed.* [My italics]

Seeing the speech in printed form, the style is very clear. However, interpreters may not always pay that much attention to rhetorical style (cf. the EP definition of interpreting); admittedly, there is not always time for elegant style. Here, however, we have a very simple, straightforward phrase that should not be difficult to convey accurately and faithfully: “It should not be changed.”

(7)

Original: *It should not be changed.*

De: Das sollte nicht geändert werden.

Fi: Tätä ei saisi muuttaa.

Sw: .., som inte skall ändras.

Original: [...]; *it should not be changed.*

De: Das sollte *+auch nicht* geändert werden.

Fi: .. eikä sitä saa muuttaa.

Sw: .. och skall inte ändras.

Original: *It should not be changed.*

De: Das darf *+auch nicht* geändert werden.

Fi: .. ja niitä+kään ei +minun mielestäni saisi muuttaa.

Sw: .. och den skall inte ändras.

Instead of faithfully repeating the simple phrase “It should not be changed.” the interpreters add ‘their comment’ in saying “that should not be changed *either.*” (The German and Finnish SI, marked with +.) Furthermore, instead of conveying the request as a separate, simple utterance, the Swedish and Finnish SI joins it with the previous utterance with ‘and’. These additions and changes in form reduce the effect of the repetition of the request. The interpreters modify the phrase as if they were the intended addressees of the message. Analysing the SI renderings one has the impression that the interpreters are commenting on what the speaker is saying.

Throughout the corpus it is possible to see that modals are treated in a somewhat inconsistent way by the interpreters. In contexts where the strength of the speaker’s stance seems to follow a clear plan, the SI versions vary from strong to weak obligation in the target languages. This seems to imply a kind of oversight, or lack of attention to these small lexical items and their role in modifying the tone of the utterance.

However, another trend that can be traced relates to the characteristics of the original speeches. In the present sample it was interesting to see that once the speech was presented freely, and not read from a script, the SI versions are in most instances both faithful and accurate in their rendition of the semantic meaning of the modals.

(8)

Original: And we *must* be ...

DE: ---

FI: ---

SW: ---

Original: You *must* follow ...

De: Sie *müssen* diese Themen aufgreifen ..

Fi: ja meidän *täytyy* seurata näitä asioita

Sw: Ni *måste* följa upp ..

Original: .. and you *must not* be put off ..

De: und Sie *dürfen* sich da *nicht*

Fi: me *emme voi* antaa kävellä yli

Sw: ni *får inte* låta nedlåsas för att

Original: .. we *must not* let ..

De: .. und wir *können* einfach *nicht* zulassen ..

Fi: .. *emme saa* jättää häntä ..

Sw: Vi *får inte* låta den mannen ..

Original: We *have got to* tackle it.

De: Wir *müssen* etwas dagegen unternehmen.

Fi: Meidän *täytyy* ..

Sw: .. som vi *måste* tackla ..

Original: We *have to* think again ..

De: .. *müssen* wir uns nochmal fragen ..

Fi: .. meidän *täytyy* ..

Sw: .. *måste* vi återtänka ..

Original: Maybe we *should* think ..

D: Vielleicht *sollten* wir uns ..

Fi: Ehkä meidän *pitäisi* laatia ..

Sw: Vi kanske *borde* fundera ..

The results show similar trends in the interpreters' way of dealing with speech acts, regardless of the language. Yet, they will become discernible only when transcriptions of originals and SI versions are compared on paper. An evaluation of SI accuracy must not forget the fact that the fundamental difference between written and oral translation is prosody. We know from our personal experience what has been confirmed by Segui and Ferrand (2000: 205-206), that we are able to infer almost immediately the mood or tone of a statement as we hear it.

6. DISCUSSION

Shifts in the choice of the modal or the quasi-modal auxiliary verb abound in the corpus, as well as the omission or addition of these modals. Some of these shifts are examples of spoken language register being the interpreter's obvious, or natural choice of expression in conveying the scripted speech of the speaker. Furthermore, some omissions or shifts can be explained by the pace of the original speech as well as the density of the scripted speech. Yet, analysing the target texts one cannot help thinking that maybe interpreters have not always been alerted to the role of the various types of speech act. Maybe the semantics of the modals do not get much attention in exercises on text analysis. Judging by the corpus, and the SI versions of the 120 speeches, one has the impression that there is room perhaps for more awareness of the role of modals, and their role in conveying the speaker's stance, or attitude towards what s/he wants to say.

Political rhetoric provides rich material for study. The chapter at hand reports work in progress. In order to obtain a representative corpus study, it would be ideal to have a multi-skilled team to study parallel texts in different languages. For Interpreting Studies, it would be particularly interesting to focus on the prosodic features of spoken texts and their SI versions.

Finally, why all this fuss about modals? We would argue that modals are an important element of natural language communication, playing an essential role in conveying the speaker's attitude towards his message. Kent Bach (2003: 155) has expressed the essence of communication as follows:

Communication aims at a meeting of the minds not in the sense that the audience is to think what the speaker thinks but only in the sense that a certain attitude toward a certain proposition is to be recognized as being put forward for consideration.

Interpreter trainers could perhaps highlight this aspect of the function of interpreting, which is to allow the audience to have the opportunity to consider the attitude towards a proposition that the speaker has put forward. Conveying this attitude faithfully might be considered as one of the quality criteria of 'accuracy' and 'faithfulness'. Yet, what may be lacking in SI accuracy in conveying the verbal elements of the Requests may be compensated for by means of prosody that is faithful to the original. Eventually, the right kind of prosody may be found to be even more important in conveying the speaker's attitude toward what he is saying than the choice of the semantically equivalent lexical item.

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