

# Textlinguistics in theory and practice

*Comparison between an English text and its Swedish translation*

## Material

When will the 'euro' be in our pockets? (Booklet from the European Commission, 1997, manuscript by Charles Pownall, London and '7 jours d'Europe', Paris)

När har vi euron i våra fickor? (broschyr utgiven av Europeiska kommissionen, 1997, manuskript av Charles Pownall, London och "7 jours d'Europe", Paris)

It is interesting to compare an English original with its Swedish translation because the differences become so obvious. Every step from a word to word translation must be a matter of choice for the translator. In this text the translator has taken many liberties and by that pointed at several differences between the theme strategies of the two languages.

## Method

### Textual analysis: theme-analysis

I have primarily been concerned with the following questions:

- \* Are subjects more frequent in theme position in English than in Swedish? If so, what are they replaced by in the Swedish translation?
- \* Swedish is famous for its inverted word order. Is that due to having more adverbials in theme position than English?
- \* Is formal subject in theme position more frequent in Swedish? If so, what does the English text have in theme position?

I have restricted the analysis to sentences containing a finite verb and ended by full stop, semicolon or colon. Those not fulfilling these criteria have been excluded from the study. I have only analysed the first constituent in sentences where there was more than one. In those sentences I have excluded connectors, often conjunctions like and, but etc., whose only function is to link the sentence to the one before.

## Result

### More sentences in Swedish

To begin with, what first struck me at the analysis was that even though the text is the very same the Swedish translator has divided it into more sentences than in the English original. The Swedish text contains 203 sentences beginning with a capital letter and ended by a full stop. The English original contains 194 sentences most of them beginning with a capital letter but some, including dotted

enumeration, with a small letter (here the Swedish text begin with a capital letter) and all ended by a full stop, a semicolon or a colon.

The English tradition seems to be dividing main clauses by semicolons and colons more often whereas the Swedish tradition seems to be completely new sentences. Semicolons are very rare in the Swedish text. The Swedish translator has also invented sentences with new information that cannot be found in the English text - mostly because of pedagogical reasons.

(1) \* The point is that the EU offers opportunities, not restrictions.

\* Detta är själva grundtanken med unionen. EU erbjuder möjligheter, inte begränsningar. (Two sentences in Swedish - for the sake of clarity perhaps)

(2) \* Euro notes will be more or less the same in all countries taking part in the single currency; they might have a small space on one side where the issuing country can be identified.

\* Ja, eurosedlarna kommer att ha i det närmaste samma utseende i alla de deltagande länderna. På sedlarnas ena sida kan utgivarlandet komma att anges.

(Clauses divided by semicolon in English and full stop in Swedish)

### Clauses without a finite verb more common in English

The Swedish text contains in all 196 (4 beginning with the finite verb) complete main clauses while the English text contains 178 (4 beginning with the finite verb). Some of the clauses have been excluded from the study because they did not contain a finite verb. Here again I found a significant difference between the languages - the Swedish text contains 7 clauses without a finite verb whereas the English original contains 17! In thirteen of the clauses the verbs are expressed in the infinitive and two clauses only contain the past participle. The Swedish translator transforms the clauses with the past participle into nominalisations and the clauses with the infinitive are translated into clauses with active verbs. There are two examples of the opposite where English active verbs are translated into Swedish nominalisations.

(3) \* Technical scenario for introduction of the euro and timetable for changeover to the single currency in 1999 finalized (end of the process scheduled for 2002).

\* Fastställande av den tekniska planen för införandet av euron och tidsplanen för övergången till den gemensamma valutan som inleds 1999 (hela processen skall vara avslutad 2002).

(The past participle without the finite verb in English and nominalisation in Swedish)

(4) \* Member States to appoint Executive Board of the ECB.

\* Medlemsstaterna utser ECB:s direktion.

(The infinitive in English and active verb in Swedish)

(5) \* Genomförandet av den inre marknaden.

\* The single market is completed.

(Nominalisation in Swedish and active verb in English)

## Heavier themes in English than in Swedish

The English text contains in all 933 words out of 174 themes all together whereas the Swedish themes contain 841 words out of 192 themes all together. In average the English text contains 5.3 words per theme and the Swedish text 4.4 words. The difference is not enormous but significant. Again this gives the English text a somewhat more formal tone. Analysis of the themes Because of the fact that the Swedish translation consisted of more sentences than the English one, I have had to look at the themes in percentages in order to be able to make a comparison between the languages.

English Swedish Subject 124 71,3 % 123 64 % Formal subject 7 3,6 %  
a. Anticipating it 1 0,6 % b. Existential there 2 1,1 % Adverbials 32  
18,4 % 47 24,5 % Wh-pronouns 10 5,7 % 9 4,7 % Object 3 1,7 % 3  
1,6 % Predicative 1 0,6 % 0 0% Interjec-tion 1 0,6 % 3 1,6 % Total  
sum: 174 192

## Subjects more frequent in English

The greatest difference between constituents of the themes of the two texts on behalf of English is that the subjects are strikingly more frequent in English. 71,3 % of the English themes contain a subject compared to only 64 % in the Swedish text. An interesting question is what the Swedish translator replaces them with. I found ten examples of themes where the English text had a subject and the Swedish translator replaced it with an adverbial. There were six examples of English subjects replaced by formal subjects in Swedish.

(6) \* Four convergence criteria have been established for that purpose:

\* Därför har man ställt upp följande fyra konvergenskriterier:

(7) \* This is when notes and coins denominated in euros will begin to circulate alongside notes and coins in national currency.

\* Från och med detta datum kommer eurosedlar och euromynt att finnas i omlopp jämsides med landets hittillsvarande sedlar och mynt.

(8) \* The situation as regards the other convergence criteria has improved considerably in recent years, especially for inflation, which has hit record lows (2.7% for the Union as a whole in 1996), and for long-term interest rates.

\* När det gäller de övriga konvergenskriterierna har situationen förbättrats betydligt de senaste åren, särskilt avseende inflationen, som nu ligger på en historiskt sett rekordlåg nivå (2,7 % för hela unionen 1996), och de långfristiga räntorna.

(9) \* Economists agree that, given the globalization of the economy, allowing government deficits to grow is no longer a valid way of boosting economic activity.

\* Mot bakgrund av ekonomins allt större internationalisering råder det bland ekonomer enighet om att en ytterligare påspädning av de offentliga underskotten inte längre är en lämplig metod för att stimulera den ekonomiska aktiviteten.

(Subject in English and adverbial in Swedish)

## Formal subjects more frequent in Swedish

The Swedish text on the other hand contains many more formal subjects - 3.6 % compared to the English 1.7. There were one example of anticipating it and three examples of existential there in the English text and seven examples of the Swedish formal subject. The difference is not as big as I thought from the beginning. Swedish is famous for its amplitude of formal subjects but I did not realise English had this many. One English sentence with anticipating it and another with existential there are transformed into subject in Swedish. Six sentences with subject in English are translated into formal subject in Swedish. English and Swedish use the strategy of making the theme lighter by using some kind of formal subject, but Swedish seems to do this more often than English.

(10) \* It is the EU Council of Ministers which will be responsible for the euro area's general exchange-rate policy.

\* EU:s ministerråd kommer att ha ansvaret för den allmänna yttre valutapolitiken för euroområdet.  
(English anticipating it translated into subject in Swedish)

(11) \* There is no risk, then, of finding yourself one day stuck with notes and coins that you cannot get rid of because they are no longer legal tender.

\* Det finns således ingen risk för att bli kvar med kronor i plånboken som inte går att växla in.  
(English existential there correspond to formal subject in Swedish)

(12) \* There will be eight different coins, ranging from one cent to two euros.

\* Mynt kommer att finnas i 8 olika valörer från 1 cent till 2 euro.  
(English existential there translated into subject in Swedish)

(13) \* Det finns många skilda uppfattningar om EU.

\* The EU means many things to many people.

(14) \* Det finns personer som anser att det blir allt svårare att se skogen för alla träd.

\* A number of people feel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to see the wood for the trees.

(15) \* Det kan vara berättigat att fråga sig vad EU egentligen är till för idag.

\* A fair question would be: What exactly is the EU for now?

(16) \* Det är detta som är själva poängen.

\* This is the point.

(17) \* Det finns många fördelar.

\* The advantages are numerous.

(18) \* Det kommer att finnas ett brett fluktuationsband på plus eller minus 15 % runt centralkurserna och interventionen vid bandgränserna kommer i princip att vara automatiska och obegränsade.

\* These will be one wide fluctuation band of plus or minus 15 per cent around the central rates, and intervention at the margins will in principle be automatic and unlimited.

(English subject translated into formal subject in Swedish)

### More adverbials create inverted word order in Swedish

Adverbials also seem to be more frequent in Swedish - 24.5 % compared to 18.4 % in the English text. Since adverbials are so common in the Swedish text - 1/4 of all the themes - an obvious conclusion is that inverted word order, i.e. the subject is preceded by the finite verb, is more frequent in Swedish according to the Swedish sentence structure theme-verb-subject-adverbial (field of the nexus)-verb-subject-adverbial (field of contents) in main clauses. Both Swedish and English have inverted word order in questions - both texts had only 4 such clauses.

### Interjections

The Swedish text also contains more interjections than the English does. It might imply that the Swedish stylistic level is more informal and closer to spoken language. But since the material is so small I cannot claim this to be typical for a Swedish text. In order to do so I will have to extend the study and use a much broader material.

### Wh-questions more common in English

To a smaller extent wh-pronouns are more common in English - 5.7 % compared to 4.7 % in Swedish. Translating the predicative into Swedish The English text also contains an example of the predicative whereas not single one could be found in the Swedish text. The Swedish translator transforms it into a subject.

(19) \* A practical example of this consultation was the Round Table organized by the Commission in May 1997.

\* Det rundabordssamtal som kommissionen inbjöd till i maj 1997 var ett konkret exempel på ett sådant samråd.

## Discussion

### Differences between English and Swedish themes

"In English, the theme position is regularly occupied by the subject in statements, the verb or 'operator' verb in imperatives, the wh-pronoun in wh-questions, connectors and adverbials", according to Anne Marie Bülow-Möller in *The Textlinguistic Omnibus: A Survey of Methods for Analysis*. The same goes for Swedish of course.

But on the other hand, in Swedish you can start a sentence with other themes than the subject much more easily than in English, according to Olle Josephson in *Att översätta med dator (Svenskan i IT-samhället)*. He claims that the adequate translation of a sentence like He came home yesterday is rather *Igår kom han hem* than *Han kom hem igår*.

Swedish is also famous for its formal subject as a kind of "placekeeper" in theme position, according to Sigurd in *En automatisk översättares problem med svenskan och andra språk (Svenskan i IT-samhället)*. Machine translations are said to contain too few formal subjects. The amount of adverbials in theme position creates inverted word order - Sigurd claims that 1/3 of all Swedish sentences begin with an adverbial. The Swedish sentence *På kvällen blir det regn* correspond to the English *In the evening there will be rain* or more commonly *There will be rain in the evening*, both with normal word order.

### Differences in strategies

Sentences both in English and Swedish are usually arranged so that it is easy for the reader to process through the text. It is easier if the verb is not kept too far back. A light theme saves most of the information in the rhematic part of the sentence, which leads to end weight. End weight is much favoured both in English and Swedish. To create this easy access to the information, writers use different strategies to make the themes light and move most of the new information into the rhematic part of the sentence (Bülow-Möller p. 154).

Some of these strategies are existentials: *There is no risk, then, of finding yourself one day stuck with notes and coins that you cannot get rid of because they are no longer legal tender* instead of: *No risk exists, then, of finding yourself one day stuck with notes and coins that you cannot get rid of because they are no longer legal tender* and cleft sentence: *It is the EU Council of Ministers which will be responsible for the euro area's general exchange-rate policy* instead of: *The EU Council of Ministers will be responsible for the euro area's general exchange-rate policy*.

The Swedish text contains more strategies like the above mentioned than does the English and one may wonder at the effect of this. According to Bülow-Möller, these strategies lead to a feeling of the text being closer to spoken language since they create end weight (p. 155). One effect may be that the Swedish text is easier to read and perhaps feels closer to spoken language whereas the English is felt to be more formal. Also, in average the English text contains heavier themes than does the Swedish and this might also increase the tone of formality in the English text. The long sentences and the larger number of clauses without a finite verb add to this too. The amount of interjections might also give the reader a feeling of closeness to spoken language in the Swedish text.

Another reason for choosing certain themes is of course to link the sentence to the one before or to make the agent invisible. In this case the writer may leave out the subject and transform the sentence into the passive. (Bülow-Möller p. 156) This might be the reason for sentences like:

\* The name 'euro' adopted for the single currency.

\* *Beslut om att den gemensamma valutan skall heta "euro"*.

Still another reason for choosing a theme might be to get rid of an adverbial that would clutter up the space between subject, verb and object (Bülow-Möller p.158) or to have the point of interest fronted for emphasis. Both these reasons might be why the Swedish translator

have fronted the adverbial on the expense of the subject as in the English theme:

\* The situation as regards the other convergence criteria has improved considerably in recent years, especially for inflation, which has hit record lows (2.7% for the Union as a whole in 1996), and for long-term interest rates.

\* När det gäller de övriga konvergenskriterierna har situationen förbättrats betydligt de senaste åren, särskilt avseende inflationen, som nu ligger på en historiskt sett rekordlåg nivå (2,7 % för hela unionen 1996), och de långfristiga räntorna.

Different languages do not have the same possibilities for moving elements about in the sentence in order to make use of those strategies. (Bülow-Möller p. 159). English and Swedish use almost the same strategies, but Swedish seems to have somewhat more possibilities for moving the constituents. This can be seen in this study where English favours subjects but where Swedish to a larger extent make use of strategies like formal subject and adverbials.

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