

PLAIN LANGUAGE IN SWEDISH TRANSLATIONS OF EU LEGAL TEXTS

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Abstract

It is well known that Swedish translations of EU legal texts do not meet the plain language standards drawn up for texts produced by Swedish authorities. The influence of poorly written source texts is often seen as the main cause, but we actually know little about the process by which these translations are produced – and therefore little about what the impediments really are for meeting these plain language standards. The results presented in this article indicate that several other factors also have a significant influence. The material consists of field observations and interviews, conducted at the Swedish translation units of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union – and the results show that factors such as strong demands for correspondence between different Swedish texts, short deadlines and an indefinable readership are of importance. A key question is whether the translations should be considered to be texts in a Swedish target system at all, or if they remain in an EU source culture? In the end, a better understanding of this translation process, could help us both to understand how we can best proceed when trying to improve plain language in these EU-texts, and, by shedding new light on plain language processes in general, to improve plain language work within Sweden too.

Keywords

EU translation, institutional translation, plain language, writing in public administration.

Background and aim

This article presents some of the main results from a study on the EU translation process for legislative texts. These results indicate that the wording of the originals, which is often considered a major impediment for achieving the plain language goals set for these texts, is just one of several factors influencing the texts in this respect.

The aim of this study has been to describe the interinstitutional translation process (of the European Union), in order to understand what the obstacles and possibilities are when trying to achieve plain language in Swedish translations of EU legal texts. The focus is on the translation *event* (Toury, 1998, 19), and on how the demands for plain language are managed in everyday work procedures, with particular interest paid to how institutional factors – such as work procedures, organization and norms – affect the process and the target texts when it comes to plain language.

The idea of plain language, that ordinary citizens should be able to read and understand texts from the authorities, has a long tradition in Sweden. Since the law is the source of many other texts from the authorities, all the way down to forms and booklets distributed to citizens, it has been argued that plain language improvements have to start with improving the language of the law. When Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, considerable progress had been made in this respect, and there was a concern that membership would mean a return to older writing traditions. Avoiding such a return has therefore, from a Swedish point of view, been one of the demands placed on the translators working with these texts. They are expected not "only" to translate them, but also to make sure that the final Swedish texts meet the plain language demands placed on other, comparable, public texts. The goal

for the Swedish translation units, stated in their internal writing instructions, is for the translations to differ as little as possible from contemporary Swedish statutes. However, several studies (e.g. Hofman, 2003; Nilsson, 2004; Parès, 2002) have indicated that the translations are far from reaching this goal. In the Swedish plain language debate (see e.g. Ekerot, 2000, 48; Ehrenberg-Sundin, 2000, 145; *Mål i mun*, 2002, 255) this is usually explained by the fact that as translations, the texts cannot deviate too much from their originals – and the originals are quite naturally not written according to Swedish plain language recommendations. But is this really the whole explanation? Translating is a very complex process, and especially so when it is also situated within such a complex institutional process as EU legislative procedure. Hence, one would expect other factors to affect the outcome of this translation process as well. The study on which the results presented here are based was designed to investigate other possible factors that might either hinder or further plain language ambitions.

The interinstitutional process referred to here is the EU codecision procedure. In this procedure, the European Commission writes a proposal for a new piece of legislation, and this proposal is then read by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union separately. Both of them have to pass the Bill in order for it to enter into force. The proposal is often amended by either the Council or the Parliament, or by both, and it can be read up to three times before a compromise is reached or the proposal is rejected. During this process the text is translated by three different translation units – at the European Commission, at the European Parliament and at the Council of the European Union – which makes this a very complex, and often lengthy, process.

Data and Method

The material for this study consists mainly of 24 interviews conducted with translators and other employees (heads of units, terminologists and people specially responsible for language quality) and one group interview with three of the Swedish lawyer-linguists working at the Council of the European Union. Lawyer-linguists are lawyers with specialised linguistic skills, who revise and finalise all EU legislation. The individual interviews usually lasted between 45 minutes and an hour, the group interview for approximately an hour and a half. The individual interviews were video-recorded except in two cases, where only audio-recording was permitted. For the group interview neither video- nor audio-recording was permitted. All interviews were held in Swedish. In the examples given in this article, emphasized words are in bold print.

When comparing what textual aspects are considered important in order to achieve plain language – at the translation units and in Sweden respectively – the account of the Swedish view is based on the analysis of five Swedish publications containing plain language recommendations. These publications are *Myndigheternas föreskrifter: Handbok i författningsskrivning* (1998), *Klarspråk lönar sig: Klarspråksarbete i kommuner, landsting och statliga myndigheter* (2006), *Myndigheternas skrivregler* (2009), *Klarspråkstestet: rapporter* (2012) and the webpage "Hur skriver man klarspråk" (Språkrådet, 2013).

The material also consists of field notes from three weeks of field studies (one week at each translation unit), but in the study presented here these have not in themselves been the subject of any systematic analysis but have been used primarily for background information, to deepen the understanding of the interviews.

The interviews were structured around five main themes, based on the results of a previously conducted pilot study, and a few questions were formulated in order to make sure all themes were addressed. However, these questions were often not needed since the participants themselves spontaneously passed from one theme to another. Apart from the pre-formulated questions, used to

initiate a new theme when needed, follow-up questions were asked based on issues brought up by the participants. The five main themes were the following:

- (1) work procedures at the translation unit;
- (2) plain language work at the translation unit;
- (3) feedback;
- (4) cooperation and communication between the three translation units involved, and
- (5) cooperation and communication between the translation units and other parts of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union respectively.

In the analysis I have looked at recurring patterns as well as aspects pointed out by only one or a few of the participants. Quantifying the results, for example by counting the number of times a certain theme is mentioned, is not of interest here since no close correspondence can be assumed between the number of times an aspect is mentioned and the significance of that aspect. The general tendency however, is that the picture given by the participants is very concordant within each unit, and, for most of the aspects, between the units as well.

Results

The findings indicate that the wording of the source text is indeed only one part of the problem, and perhaps not even the biggest part. There are other constraints placed on these texts, and on the translators when working with them. I list here five different factors that I claim have impact on plain language aspects of the Swedish texts:

- (1) the requirement to re-use previous translations;
- (2) short deadlines;
- (3) the view of the reader;
- (4) what sphere the texts should be considered to belong to, and
- (5) the view of the concept of "plain language".

In the following I will present each of these factors, and also to some extent discuss the previously known impact of the originals.

The requirement to re-use previous translations

One factor that seems to have a considerable impact on the process as well as the products is the need for a translation to correspond to previous Swedish translations. This tendency was surprisingly strong. In both interviews and observations, this seemed to impose a greater constraint on the translation than the need to connect to the English source text.⁹

This need for correspondence between different Swedish texts is explained by the way these texts are linked to each other within the legal system. If a concept from the EU Treaties is used in a certain

⁹ This is also further supported by an analysis of revisions made in the translations, where revisions aimed at ensuring agreement with previous translations proved to be one of the most frequent categories (see Bendegard, forthcoming).

directive – the word referring to this concept should be the same in the directive as in the Treaty. This requirement is not unique to the Swedish translations or even to EU translations in general. It is rather a general rule for EU legislation, and applies to source languages as well as target languages. Nonetheless it has consequences for the translators and the translations as it restricts the available strategies. For instance, the need for correspondence was referred to by Kristin in example (1) when she explained why the translators are sometimes prevented from using the terminology required from Sweden for example:

(1)

Och då kan de [svenska myndigheter] ju komma med synpunkter, som vi ibland inte kan ta hänsyn till. Och det beror ju i såna fall ofta då på att, man redan har. Att det är en rättsakt som bygger på en tidigare rättsakt. Där terminologin redan är definierad och för att inte skapa total förvirring då så kan man... Det kan ju vara omöjl [avbryter sig], eller ja det är inte rekommenderat naturligtvis, att frånga terminologin i såg grundförordningen.

And then they [Swedish authorities] may have comments, which we sometimes cannot consider. And that is in these cases often because, we already have. It is an act that is based on an earlier act. Where the terminology is already defined and in order not to create total confusion you can... It can be imposs [interrupting herself], or well it is not recommended of course, to deviate from the terminology in, say, the basic regulation.

It is of course not unproblematic that the translators are prevented from using the terminology used in Sweden, and requested by Swedish experts in a certain area. Using the terminology established in Sweden is considered to be one key component in producing an idiomatic translation (which is also considered to be of great importance, (see section "Localizing 'plain language'"). Here we see that the need for correspondence can be in conflict with this striving for idiomaticity – and that the need for correspondence prevails in these cases. This "correspondence norm" is also stronger than the norm "stay close to the source text", which is shown by the fact that if the source text does not comply with this (that is, if the source text (e.g. a directive) has used another word than the Treaty) and the translator is aware of this – the translation should, ideally, not follow the source text in this respect.

From the point of view of Swedish plain language aspirations, this strong requirement to follow formulations of previous texts means that we cannot concentrate only on improving the source texts – we also have to address our own "textual history" within the European Union.

Short deadlines

It was expected that time pressure would be one of the impediments to achieving clearly written translations. Apart from the common sense aspect, there is also previous research indicating that time is an important factor (*På väg mot ett bättre myndighetsspråk*, 2001, 103; Tiililä, 2009, 95). It therefore did not come as a surprise that the participants considered short deadlines to be one of the main obstacles. As Pia claims in example (2), a particularly difficult situation is when the rules are changed and the deadline is unexpectedly brought forward.

(2)

Och så sitter man och jobbar då med slutversionen. Och så plötsligt så kommer det som en blix från klar himmel. Då drar de in tidsfristen, med flera **dar!** Säg att jag hade fyra dar på

mig så plötsligt hade jag bara två. Och det var liksom att jobba i expressfart det var precis så man lyckades pressa igenom det och jag vet inte vilken kvalitet det var på det där men inte sån som jag skulle önskat i alla fall.

And there you are working on the final version. And suddenly it is like a bolt from the blue. They cut down the time assigned by **days!** Let's say that I had four days to do the job, then suddenly I had only two. And that meant you had to work at top speed to get through it and I don't know what the quality was, certainly not the kind I would have wanted anyway.

It is interesting to notice, however, that when talking about time pressure and deadlines, many of the participants also connect this with the re-use of previous translations. It appears that apart from being the result of a demand for intertextual consistency (see above), this re-use is also caused by lack of time. This is stated for example by Pia, in example (3).

(3)

Du sa, hinder. Och då sa jag tidsaspekten och så sa jag texternas [ohörbart] utformning. Men jag måste också säga, TWB [Translators Workbench]. Som också är ett hinder för klarspråk. Faktiskt. Och det är att när man får upp, en träff, så tar man den utan att tänka på, är det här, det optimala? Okej att det finns där, innebär ju att det är en möjlig lösning. Och har man då... Som sagt var tänker man inte till den där extra gången, då tar man den möjliga lösningen och så är man nöjd med det och sen går man vidare. Och den där möjliga lösningen, kanske inte var så där, superbra just i **det** sammanhanget som man håller på med just **nu**. Och det har ju, och när man granskar åt varandra så hela tiden så kommer det upp. "Ja du vet det här kom ju upp i Workbench. Jag vet att det inte är så bra men..." [tonfallet markerar citat] ((skratt)) Ja. Men då liksom har man tagit det och sen så fortsätter man. Istället för att tänka jaa, det är inte riktigt bra här vad skulle man kunna göra istället? Men det tar ju tid. Och tid är ju, bristvara. Så att... TWB är ett fantastiskt verktyg men man måste utnyttja det med stor urskiljning om det inte ska bli ett hinder för ett bra slutresultat. Det hjälper en tidsmässigt men det hjälper en inte **alltid** kvalitetsmässigt.

You said, obstacles. And then I said time and I said [inaudible] wording of the texts. But I must also say, TWB [Translators Workbench]. Which also hinders plain language. Really. And that is because when you get a match, you take it without considering, is this the optimum? Okay the fact that it is there means that it is a possible solution. And then if you have... As I said if you do not think it through one extra time, you take that possible solution and are happy with that and move on. And that possible solution was perhaps not really great in **this** particular context you are working on **now**. And that has, and when we revise for each other this comes up all the time. "Well you know this came up in Workbench. I know it is not very good but..." [intonation marking quote] ((laugh)) Yes. But then you have used it and you continue. Instead of thinking well, it's not very good here, what could be used instead? But that takes time. And time is short. So... TWB is a fantastic tool but one must use it with great discretion to keep it from becoming an obstruction to a good final outcome. It improves speed but it does not **always** improve quality.

Translators Workbench, which Pia mentions here, is a CAT (Computer Aided Translation) tool that allows the translator to re-use parts of previously translated texts. Previously translated documents are divided into segments (a segment usually equals a sentence) and stored in databases. When a translator starts working on a new document, previous documents are retrieved from these databases to create a TWB memory. Often, all previous documents containing segments that match the segments in the new document are retrieved – including less successful translations. The databases are sometimes looked through, in order to remove such less successful documents, but these clean-ups do not suffice. The varying quality of the database documents used to create TWB's memory are considered a major drawback of TWB by the participants.

It seems therefore that short deadlines have a negative effect on plain language, not only because they give the translators less time to do the necessary research, for example – but also because they further reinforce the re-use of previous parts of texts, even when this is not necessary and when the previous translation is perhaps not ideal (either in the first place, or just not in this new context).

The intended reader – and the expected one

The audience for whom a text is written is a central factor to take into account when working with plain language. So who is considered to be the reader of these texts? There appear to be several layers of answers to this question, but here I will only go into the answers given by the participants when directly asked about this. The answer was then generally one of the following:

- Swedish citizens
- No one
- The Swedish members of the European Parliament

It has sometimes been argued, e.g. by Ehrenberg-Sundin (2000,144f) and Pym (2000,4f), that there are different expectations in Northern Europe on the one hand, and in continental Europe, on the other hand, about whether or not the man-in-the-street should be able to understand legislative texts – be they EU texts or domestic ones. Seen from this perspective we can conclude that the participants generally orient themselves toward the Nordic view.

The second answer listed above, that the reader is "no one", would appear to exclude any other answer, but is actually often given by participants who also mention other readers – for example the Swedish members of the European Parliament. It is likely that the participant's answers reflect both who is considered to be the ideal (but perhaps hypothetical) reader, and who is considered to actually read the texts. Hence the heading's distinction between intended and expected readers.

There is no simple answer as to why several participants consider that no one will read the translations, but one contributing factor may be that they receive little or no feedback from the end users. However, the fact that the reader is so often perceived of as non-existing must of course be assumed to have an impact on plain language work. Especially if we also take into account the short deadlines mentioned above, it appears very reasonable to believe that the translator – in a text which the translator assumes no one will read – does not spend excessive time on rephrasing for the sake of clarity. If these are indeed texts with no effect on other public documents, this could be an effective strategy. Ideally it would give the translator time to work with plain language in another text that might have more impact on public documents. Such an impact may occur for example when EU legislation is used as the basis for Swedish legislation or other domestic documents. Palm (1997, 29–30) has previously shown that the translations do affect subsequent Swedish texts in this way.

However, the strategy might also prove to be a problem, not least if such a document – which has been judged to be a document that no one will read – is later used as the basis for other EU legislation, which in turn might be used as the basis for Swedish legislation or in other ways have an impact on subsequent public documents. Future translators might then find themselves bound to formulations in the previous document. From what we have seen regarding the re-use of previous texts, this is not a very unlikely scenario.

When the main reader was considered to be the Swedish-speaking members of the European Parliament (an answer which, naturally, occurred only in interviews from the translation unit at this particular EU institution), this had an unexpected consequence for plain language work. It was then claimed by some of the participants that when the source language is English, the translator has to be more careful to keep the translation in agreement with the wording of the source text, compared to when the source text is written in a lesser-known language. Because when the source language is English, the members of parliament can compare the source and target texts – and if they do not find the correspondence they expect, this might have a negative impact on their trust in Swedish translations in general. Per puts it like this, in example (4).

(4)

Och då kan de börja undra men, om det nu står... anomalies and irregularities in the Peruvian electoral process så, hur mycket som inte stämmer. Kan det där vara samma sak? Hur ska vi kunna lita på våra översättare? Och de är ju ledamöter de är **inte** språkligt utbildade. De kan av en ren tillfällighet vara det men, det vore ju renaste orimligheten att börja kräva det.

And then they can start wondering but, if it says... anomalies and irregularities in the Peruvian electoral process then, how much that does not correspond. Could that be the same thing? How are we supposed to trust our translators? And they are members of parliament – they have **no** linguistic training. They could have, by chance, but it would of course be completely unreasonable to start requiring it.

This and similar examples show the impact of the institutional process. The reasoning of the participants is very rational, but it suggests an orientation toward something other than the idea of creating plain language translations for Swedish citizens. And this other orientation is inherent in the interinstitutional process, because before the legislation enters into force, and becomes relevant to citizens, it has to be read by a different group of readers, by politicians and officials at the various EU institutions – and we see here that the consideration for this reader group, quite naturally, foregrounds other textual aspects and later, more undefined, groups of readers.

But what about the originals?

Arguably the originals affect the possibility of the translations meeting the plain language recommendations. The constraints imposed by the originals are highlighted by several of the participants, for example by Peter and Rebecka in examples (5) and (6) respectively, who both talk about the conflict arising between, on the one hand, the need to follow the original and, on the other hand, the need to follow other instructions.

(5)

Samtidigt är vi ju bundna av originalet alltid, eftersom vi jobbar på en översättningsavdelning. ((ler))

At the same time we are bound by the original always, since we work at a translation unit. ((smiles))

(6)

Och då blir det ju jättejästesvårt för vi är ju. Alltså, man är ju översättare. Man måste ju följa, förlagan.

And then it becomes really really difficult because we are ... I mean, one is a translator. One has to follow, the source text.

These and other comments suggest that the wording of the originals is of importance, and does affect the wording of the final translations. However, as previously mentioned, I consider this to be one among several factors – and since this is the one factor previously most focused on, I will not devote more time and space to it here. I will confine myself to making clear that this aspect is of course also present in the material.

Where does the text belong?

When looking at institutional factors affecting plain language work in the translation process, we also have to consider the following question: Is the translation a Swedish text, or an EU text in Swedish?

Toury (1995, 29) stated that translations are "facts of target cultures" – that it is within the target culture they obtain their status as translations. But what is then the target culture here? We talk about translation as something that involves a transfer from a source language and a corresponding source culture, into a target language and a corresponding target culture – as illustrated in Figure 1.

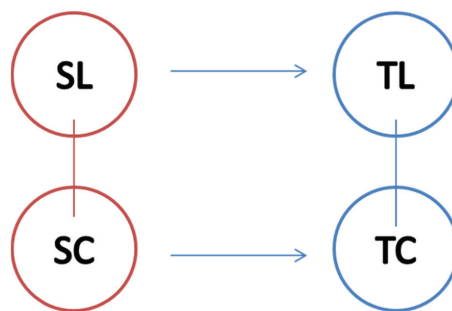


Figure 1. Traditional representation of the relation between source language/source culture and target language/target culture.

In the case of the process studied here, such a view would imply that the translation into Swedish would also involve a transfer into a Swedish target culture. ("Culture" is of course a notoriously slippery concept. I use it here to refer to the reality to which a text is linked, the frame of reference of

the text.) When plain language in the Swedish EU translations is discussed, at least in the Swedish plain language debate, I would say that this is how the process is generally imagined. However, when it comes to these legal texts, I have come to question this picture. I think this translation process would be better illustrated as in Figure 2, where the source text, in a source language, is translated into a target language – but the culture remains the same.

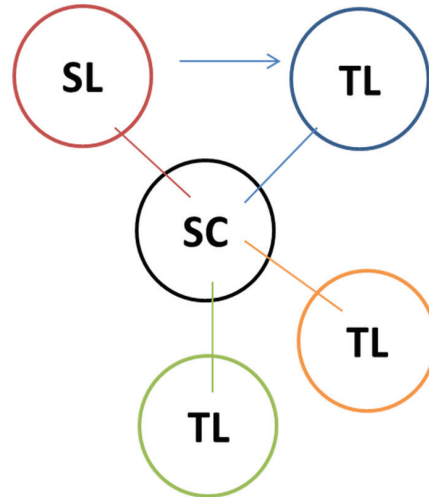


Figure 2. The relation between source language/source culture and multiple target languages in EU-translation.

In the translation of these legislative texts, the target culture remains that of the EU and the EU legal system. And of course, in the case of EU translation, the same goes for the other target languages involved in this picture as well – they all remain within the same EU culture.

An indication that it is the EU setting that constitutes the culture here is for example the fact that in the Swedish translations domestic Swedish terms are often avoided – in order to make sure that Swedish terms are not used to refer to EU concepts. As a result, an almost parallel Swedish terminology is often created. It is quite clear that the frame of reference here is, and is required to be, the EU legal system – not a national Swedish culture or the Swedish legal system.

A second indication is that although it is desirable for the translations to agree with terminology and wording of texts originally written in the member states, it is considered far more important that they agree with terminology and wording in previous EU texts – as was mentioned earlier when talking about the requirement to re-use previous translations. And this is true not only for terms directly taken from primary legislation, or for strictly legal terminology, but also for wording in a more general sense. It is clear that the strongest intertextual connections are with other EU texts – not with domestic texts.

A third indication is that the EU organization often appears to be the primary text recipient, rather than the member states. One example of this is when the needs of the readers within the EU institution (for example, as we saw earlier, the members of the European Parliament) are taken into consideration, rather than the needs of external readers (for example citizens or authorities in the member states). Another example is the fact that, although the quality of the translations is of course important, their most important aspect is that they must be finished in time for voting. This is stated by both Klas and Kjell, in examples (7) and (8) respectively.

(7)

Men dokument måste hela tiden gå och det är väl vårt primära fokus att få ut dem i tid.

But there are always documents that have to be delivered and I guess that it is our primary focus to get them finished in time.

(8)

Ibland är det ju så att det viktigaste är att texten är klar i tid och det är det väl fortfarande. ...
Texten är ju... Det är meningslöst om den är perfekt, men inte klar i tid.

Sometimes the most important thing is that the text is finished in time and I guess it is still like that. The text is... It is pointless if it is perfect, but not finished in time.

Also, the analysis of the interviews shows that when the translators get positive feedback from their own EU institution (but from outside the translation unit itself), it is usually for having met the deadline.

So, in my view, the EU organization itself, rather than the member states, constitutes the target culture. One could of course claim that this is just an extreme form of source-oriented translation – bringing the reader to the text and not the other way around. But viewing the process as shown in Figure 2, rather than as in Figure 1, nonetheless changes the basis for plain language work. Because there is a fundamental clash between on the one hand a (Swedish) plain language movement that is based on the idea that a text should be adapted to its reader, and which takes for granted that the readers are ordinary Swedish citizens, and on the other hand an EU legal system centred on itself and on the EU organization, and based on the idea that all nation-specific connotations should, and have to, be avoided. And while the obscurities and gobbledygook of the originals, and the difficulty for the translations to free themselves from these originals, have been much discussed in the Swedish plain language discourse, the problems caused by this "cultural" discrepancy have so far not been adequately addressed in this debate.

This clash can be seen on several other levels of plain language work as well – within Sweden too (separate from all EU connections). One of the major challenges is always in taking the reader's frame of reference as the starting point, rather than the frame of reference of the writer or the institution issuing the text. The difference is that we are then not dealing with cultures, or frames of reference, that are as clearly geographically separate – nor do we have this instance of interlingual translation, marking the transition – so this clash is harder to spot in these purely Swedish cases. Another difference is of course that it is not (at least not generally) explicitly required in these cases to stick to the institution's frame of reference – although it is likely that informal instructions and workplace-specific norms may sometimes require it (see e.g. Larsson, 1989, 240; *På väg mot ett bättre myndighetsspråk*, 2001, 103ff.).

Localizing "plain language"

The analysis of the interviews has also indicated that "plain language" may refer to something slightly different in the EU setting studied here than it usually does in a Swedish context. In Swedish plain language campaigns, the main focus has been the reader and the textual (overall) structure. Questions such as the reader's previous knowledge, and why the reader is reading this text (what his or her aim is) have been central, and the importance of metatext, such as headings and table of contents, to help

the reader to get an overview of the text, have been highlighted. It is of course also part of the recommendations that one should avoid such features as archaic words and overly long sentences, but this is of less importance.

The participants in this study on the other hand speak very little about the reader's previous knowledge or the importance of informative headings, for example. This is very understandable since these are aspects that the EU translators do not have much (or any) control over. What is interesting, however, is that they do stress two things that are usually not mentioned in the Swedish plain language discourse. One of these is that the text should be as short and concise as possible, which is for example pointed out in example (9), where Per answers the question what "plain language" means.

(9)

Betunga inte texten med ord som ingenting har där att beställa.

Do not burden the text with words that do not fulfil any purpose there.

The second of these things is that the text should be idiomatic, although the participants do not usually use this particular word. Instead they say for example that the text should be written in "good Swedish", that it should "not look translated" etcetera – textual qualities which in my opinion equate with the qualities of an idiomatic text.

One can argue that both these aspects show that the notion of plain language has been localized, and adapted to this specific situation of text production. When Peter, in example (10), compares their plain language work with that of officials at Swedish public authorities, he also points out that "plain language" may have a different meaning in an EU setting, and that there may be a need for recommendations other than the ones established in a monolingual Swedish setting.

(10)

Då är det ju en annan sak, men vi verkar under helt andra förutsättningar här och har ett original som vi ska överföra till svenska. Så på det sättet kan man säga att klarspråksbegreppet kanske också... Har en lite annorlunda innebörd, under de speciella förutsättningar som vi verkar här, än vad det har i en rent svenskspråkig miljö. Tycker jag. Det är viktigt att komma ihåg.

Then it is a different matter, but we work under completely different conditions here and have an original that we are supposed to transfer to Swedish. So in that sense one can say that the notion of plain language perhaps also... Has a slightly different meaning, under the special conditions under which we work here than it has in a purely Swedish environment. I think. That is important to remember.

But why then, are these two particular aspects, conciseness and idiomaticity, dealt with in the interviews? If we compare them with the Swedish recommendations¹⁰, we find that conciseness is not pointed out as an aspect of plain language in these recommendations. It is, however, stressed in the EU

¹⁰*Myndigheternas föreskrifter: Handbok i författningsskrivning* (1998), *Klarspråk lönar sig: Klarspråksarbete i kommuner, landsting och statliga myndigheter* (2006), *Myndigheternas skrivregler* (2009), *Klarspråkstestet: rapporter* (2012) and the web page "Hur skriver man klarspråk" (Språkrådet, 2013).

Joint Practical Guide for the Drafting of Community Legislation (2003), where it is stated that the drafting of a legislative act must be "simple", "concise", and "contain no unnecessary elements" (*Joint Practical Guide*, 2003, 10). The emphasis on brevity, on behalf of the participants, can therefore be considered the effect of influence from this EU view of what constitutes a plain language text. Similarly, emphasizing idiomaticity also seems to show the influence of factors specific to this text production process. (I consider translation to be a form of text production, not "merely" re-production, although with special prerequisites and constraints.) Being able to produce a covert translation (i.e. a target text that cannot be distinguished from a non-translated text in the target language) can very well be a criterion for a good translation, if covertness is requested (which it is to a great extent in the case of EU legislation). But a text can very well be perfectly idiomatic, and still violate all the plain language recommendations – and the other way around (following every instruction on how to write plain language, but lacking in idiomaticity). It appears that in this EU translational setting, idiomaticity, from being a quality criterion for a good translation has come to be conceived as a key component also when it comes to plain language.

So what are the consequences of this shift in meaning? If the label "plain language" is assigned different meanings in a Swedish discourse compared to an EU discourse, this is firstly something we have to be aware of when discussing plain language work in the EU setting, in order not to talk at cross purposes. Secondly, it can be argued that such a shift in meaning could hinder plain language by shifting the focus to other aspects. But here one needs to be very cautious. It cannot be claimed that this localization of the plain language concept is necessarily a reason behind the lack of plain language. The localization could just as well, in itself, be the result of the fact that the plain language recommendations (or demands) are not compatible with the institutional framework within which these texts are produced (for example not with the factors previously mentioned here). One way to deal with this incompatibility could be, then, to adjust the recommendations into something that works in this setting.

Regardless of the relation between cause and effect, the localization itself is interesting. It is interesting because of what it may tell us about the conditions for plain language in the EU translational setting, but also because it might tell us something about plain language work in general as well. It is not certain that localizing plain language is a characteristic of the translation units only, or due to the fact that they work with translations. Such localizing may take place in monolingual settings as well. A question mark in the comparison made here between the EU discourse and the Swedish discourse is that the comparison is made between interview statements of the translators, and Swedish written recommendations – two materials that are clearly not fully comparable. It is possible that an interview study from a Swedish workplace would show the same discrepancy between recommendations, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how writers describe what they consider plain language to be and how they say they work with it (which in turn may differ from their actual practice, but that is not the topic here). Such an interview study was recently presented in a degree project (Edin 2013). Although it is only a minor study, it indicates that no such discrepancy was found at the particular workplace under study. On the other hand, some of the results found by Nord (2011, 184) would indicate that there is indeed a discrepancy between written recommendations and the actual revisions made by language consultants when checking texts (in a Swedish, monolingual situation). Neither Nord's nor Edin's results point to any special emphasis being laid on conciseness or idiomaticity, and it may therefore still be considered characteristic of the translation units to emphasize these particular aspects.

The results indicate that the question of whether plain language recommendations are always, or

often, adapted to local conditions in one way or another, could be an interesting area for further research on plain language work in general – not only in translational settings. This could tell us if the difference between Edin's and Nord's results are due to the difference between the expressed norm (in Edin's study) and the actual norm (in Nord's study) – or due to differences between workplaces. It might also make it possible to relate the EU interview material of this study to Swedish material. This would enable a more reliable comparison, and perhaps make it possible to state an opinion as to whether or not the particular adaptations in the EU setting are actually a consequence of the fact that we are dealing with translation here.

Conclusion

It has been argued here that the lack of plain language (understood as non-conformance to current plain language recommendations) in Swedish EU translations cannot be explained solely by the fact that the texts are bound to their source texts. Other factors also come into play here, such as the fact that the translations are bound to previous Swedish translations (a factor further accentuated by short deadlines), that the image of the reader is ambiguous and that the translated texts can be considered to be EU texts rather than Swedish texts. I have also argued that the notion of plain language itself seems to mean something slightly different in the EU setting under study than in Swedish plain language discourse. It is not clear, however, whether this can also be seen as a factor explaining the lack of plain language. Rather – it is likely that this re-definition of plain language is itself the consequence of the incongruence between on the one hand Swedish plain language demands, and on the other hand the limits set by the institutional framework of the EU. All of these factors indicate that if we want to improve plain language in these translations, we cannot concentrate only on the translation's relation to its source text – we have to consider other constraints in the process as well, and many of them are related to the position and function of translations within the EU institutions.

Furthermore, we have seen that these results might inspire new areas of research on plain language – not only in translational settings but also in monolingual institutional communication. The results indicate, for example, that the participants might make a distinction between, on the one hand, an ideal, but possibly hypothetical, reader and, on the other hand, who they believe will actually read the text. Further research might shed light on whether this indication is true, and if a similar distinction is made also in other settings – as well as on what effect the image of the ideal and actual reader respectively in that case might have on plain language work. Another suggestion for further research, based on the conclusions in this article, concerns if and how the plain language recommendations are adapted to concrete processes of text production, and what consequences (positive or negative) this might have on the final texts.

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