

Svenja Kranich (SFB Mehrsprachigkeit, Universität Hamburg)

Translating epistemic modality with evidentiality: Evidence from English-German translations of popular scientific texts

The exact nature of the relation between epistemic modality and evidentiality is still subject to debate. While there are very good reasons to clearly separate the two concepts (cf. Cornillie 2009), the present paper focuses on an effect of their conceptual proximity (cf. Nuyts 2005: 11f.), namely on the phenomenon of shifts between the two conceptual domains in translations.

Competent bilinguals can be shown to occasionally choose evidential expressions as translations of epistemic modal markers, as in the following example:

- (1) English Original: Certain autoimmune diseases tend to afflict those with particular HLA types, **most likely** because those HLA types when linked to particular antigens **may** look like naturally occurring proteins in the body.

German Translation: Menschen mit bestimmten HLA-Typen tendieren eher zu einigen dieser selbstzerstörerischen Erkrankungen. **Die Wissenschaftler vermuten, dass** die entsprechenden Zelloberflächenmoleküle körpereigenen Proteinen zu sehr ähneln, wenn sie bestimmte fremde Proteinfragmente anlagern und der Abwehr präsentieren.

The corpus used for this study consists of around 320,000 words of English popular scientific articles and their German translations (published in *Scientific American*, *Natural Scientist* and *Spektrum der Wissenschaft*). All epistemic uses of the modals *may*, *might*, *can* and *must* were extracted from the corpus and the translations of the utterances containing them were classified according to a number of criteria (e.g. grammatical category, modal strength).

The present paper focuses on cases of the type exemplified in (1), i.e. cases where the translator has chosen an evidential expression instead of an epistemic modal expression. I will argue that these cases represent non-arbitrary adaptations in the translation process. Often, they can be seen as a kind of explicitation. Instead of merely evaluating the likelihood of the truth of a proposition *p*, the translator also offers information as to the evidence on which this evaluation is based. Furthermore, the translational shift can help to attribute the evaluation to someone other than the speaker, as in (1). Translational choices as in (1), where the responsibility for the evaluation of truth is attributed to a third party (while the default source of evaluation in epistemic modal marking is the speaker) can thus be related to the different communicative situation constituted by translation (cf. Becher *forthc.*): the evidential expression allows the translator to make it clear that it is not his or her own evaluation that is at stake in the text.

On a more general note, the results suggest that, while it is desirable to distinguish the domains of epistemic modality and evidentiality from each other, there seem to be textual functions (such as not assuming full responsibility for the truth of *p*, hedging) which can be fulfilled by both.

References

- Becher, Viktor (forthc.): “Abandoning the notion of “translation-inherent” explicitation. Against a dogma of translation studies”. *Across Languages and Cultures*.
- Cornillie, Bert (2009): “Evidentiality and epistemic modality. On the close relationship between two different categories”. *Functions of Language* 16:1, 44–62.
- Nuyts, Jan (2005): “The modal confusion: on terminology and the concepts behind it”, in: Klinger, Alex / Henrik Høeg Müller (Hgg.): *Modality. Studies in Form and Function*. London: Equinox, 5-38.