

How (not) to keep up your English

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Structure of Presentation

- Identify problems caused by:
 - having learned Finnish
 - living outside the US
- Solutions
 - specifically regarding translation
 - general language upkeep
- Group Discussion

The perils of learning Finnish...

- Interference
 - Semantics
 - “Nely, we’ll need paper mugs.” (cf *mukit*)
 - Definiteness
 - a study showed that translations from Finnish into English have more definite articles than untranslated texts (but now I can’t find it...)
 - Grammatical structures
 - Premodification begins to feel normal...

The perils of learning Finnish #2

- (Disturbances in) Saliience Threshold

- English vs Finnish shampoo ads:

“Fuller, thicker, fresher, cleaner — better than ever.”

“Raikkaat, puhtaat, terveet hiukset — kauniimmat kuin koskaan” (‘Fresh, clean, healthy hair — more beautiful than ever’)

- British and Finnish newspaper descriptions of Davis Cup match

Sampras hävisi molemmat kaksinpelinsä (‘Sampras lost both his singles matches’).

English version: *His Davis Cup debut in last year’s final was a personal nightmare as he lost both of his singles matches.*

[examples here and next page from Chesterman, Andrew (2007) “The unbearable lightness of English words,” in R. Jääskeläinen et al. (eds), *Text, Processes, and Corpora: Research Inspired by Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit*. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopistopaino, 231-241.]

Salience threshold, ex 3

“A Finnish text in a translation exam mentions a research fund that has succeeded in accumulating a sizeable sum of money from scratch *lyhyessä ajassa* (literally, ‘in a short time’). Of 25 examinees, 14 indeed do translate the passage as something like “... the contribution of the fund is significant in that the University has been able to raise the sum from zero to the present level in a short time”; the examiner feels there is something stylistically odd about the end of the sentence. Eleven examinees feel the need to add something to the phrase: *in such a short time* or *in a very short time*; the published translation also adds *very*.”

Salience threshold in translation

- Olen hänen vierellään valvonut öitä sairaalassa, kun hän oli pieni poika ja hoidettiin vakavia asioita.
- I sat up with him for endless nights in the hospital, when he was a small boy seriously ill.

Sirkku Peltola, Tyttö ja varis

Perils of learning Finnish #3

- Mixing idioms/cultural references

Syntymäpäivä, **ei pyöreitä.**

It's my birthday, not a round number / not a big one.

Sirkku Peltola, Tyttö ja varis

The perils of living outside an English-speaking country

- Not learning English terms, leading to code-switching:
 - “Honey, did you pay the *yhtiövastike*?” (cf co-op fee, maintenance fee, association fee, housing association fee, etc.)
- Finnish has a better word:
 - *elämys*
 - *sivistynyt*
 - *ahdistavaa*

Perils of living outside, #2

- Not keeping up with cultural references
 - O'Reilly Factor
 - Glenn Beck
 - commercials played at the Super Bowl
 - (a million other things...)

- Not keeping up with youth culture and language
 - Jarde: *Mitäs sä mun hommista noin vouhkaat. Ota relaa Säde. . . Chill out [but that's what I said in the 70s]*
 - *Tää nyt on kait kuitski ihan mun keissi.*
[As far as I can tell, this is my gig.]
 - Sullon ihan yperhimmee logiikka. Sää oot Säde ihan löytöilves. [literally: found/rescue ilves]
 - Cool logic, Säde. You're awesome. [help, please!]

[Sirkku Peltola, Tyttö ja varis]

- Mixing of British and American varieties
 - Älä nyt siitä enää ala. Pieniä rahoja hei! Todella pieniä rahoja. Täytyykö tätä tässä nyt jankata. **On joo helevetti.** Se nyt ole sun asias.
 - Oh don't start that again. Petty cash! It's nothing. Do we really have to keep going on about this? **Bloody hell. / Go to hell / Goddammit/ Damn you.** That's none of your business.

[Sirkku Peltola, Tyttö ja varis]

Solutions?

- Check translations with people who don't know Finnish if possible, or at least who have not seen the Finnish.
 - (Cf., before that a crucial part of my process is reading my translations out loud to my bilingual husband, which he checks against the Finnish original.)
- Liberal reading of parallel texts (esp. in translation teaching, but I also read modern plays)
- Asking Facebook friends to help with translation problems

Translation aids

- thesaurus.com
- [urban dictionary](#) / [urbaani sanakirja](#)
- rhymezone.com
- cheap Fin-Eng dictionary app

General Language Upkeep

- Reading (besides what I do for work):
 - Two monthly Book Clubs with English-speaking women
 - New York Times, New York Review of Books, Oprah Magazine and other mags available electronically through Helmet
- [Helmet \(Helsinki Library Portal\)](#)
 - Facebook
- Socializing with English-speakers
 - American Women's Club
 - Colleagues (c.f. British/Am variety mixing)
- Guiltfree-Netflix, mainly with my bilingual daughter who explains things I don't get (and I do the same for her)
- Annual trip to England (c.f. variety mixing) and to US (never long enough)

Useful strategies?

- Discuss with 1-2 people sitting near you the biggest problems you experience with maintaining/updating your language skills, and how you try to solve them. What works for you? What seems not to work? What are your biggest takeaways from today's talks?
 - Choose 1-2 things to share with the whole group.
- Useful websites?

Group-generated ideas

- NEaT!!!!
- Getting to know other translators and networking with them.
- Economist magazine
- Check out places like feedly.com; flipboard app; reddit.com;
- Watching TV – Graham Norton
- Online resources
 - Ozdic.com (type in a word, gives you examples)
 - Linguee.com

More ideas

- Audio books (Homo Sapiens, Harari, syntax is nicely varied) (Trial: [audible.com](https://www.audible.com))
 - Nb: be sure to listen to a sample first, in case the voice is annoying
 - Alan Partridge books, read by Steven Coogan
 - Librivox.org (books)
- Podcasts – NPR, BBC, Diane Rehm show, 1A is the replacement; WATO (The World at One); MSNBC
- Skype with friends and family
- Youtube channels – Joe Rogan podcast; ginger runner; toddler youtube, e.g. unwrapping Kinder eggs

- Children's books help you to keep prepositions accurate, phrasal expressions,
- WhatsApp groups – helps to keep slang updated
- Watching TV – filmon.com (free version good enough, also subscription)
- Sky News – online
- Merriam Webster – interesting Twitter feed
- Chicago Manual of Style – also on Twitter

- Useful to find good comedians, SNL, good stand-up comedians
- The Today Program
- For keeping up with slang, find zines
- Gossip magazines (good for current slang)
- Source of radio shows: radio.garden