Punctuation in Finnish and German: a contrastive analysis of the use of the colon and its application to translation studies

Keywords: colon, contrastive analysis, Finnish, German, translation

This presentation addresses the functions and interpretations of the colon in Finnish and German, such as in the sentences containing lists *Niin trollit verkossa tekevät: ärsyttävät, provosoivat, hämmentävät ja toistavat jotakin hokemaa niin kauan, että muutkin tarttuvat siihen* ('That's how trolls behave online: they annoy, provoke, confuse, and repeat some catchphrase until others pick it up as well') or, in German, *Denn: Wer zahlt, dem ist Bildung etwas wert* ('Because: Whoever pays values education'), where the colon is used as a pragmatic device. While Finnish and German grammars share similarities in their use of the colon—such as introducing lists and direct speech—they also exhibit notable differences; to this end, this corpus-based analysis seeks to examine these differences by determining the extent of these variations and exploring their underlying causes. Based on 4000 examples extracted from two newspaper corpora, we define the syntactic, structural and semantic variation of the use of the colon between Finnish and German. While the syntactic analysis examines the sentence and phrase structures before and after the colon, the structural analysis focuses on what follows the colon, such as a list, direct speech, or indirect speech. Lastly, the semantic analysis investigates how the statements before and after the colon are thematically connected. Furthermore, since punctuation marks have largely been neglected in the field of translation studies, we aim to discuss how the differences in the use of the colon are rendered in translations. Specifically, we draw on existing research in the field as well as introduce important theoretical and methodological questions regarding how punctuation in translation preserves the intended meaning and communicative nuances of the original text. The results of the study are particularly important for translators who have to recognize and interpret sentence and text topological differences in translated texts as well as for language German learners of Finnish or Finnish learners of German who face linguistic difficulties in acquiring the subtle nuances associated with punctuation.

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