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Translation as Language Making in Sign Language Revitalisation

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This article highlights the translator's crucial role in the revitalisation of the severely endangered Finland-Swedish Sign Language (FinSSL). By giving voice to professional translators, filling in lexical gaps in FinSSL as part of the translation task, we discuss the concept of “Language Making” in relation to language revitalisation. The data of the study comprises interviews with two translators responsible for translating official information by authorities in Finland from Swedish into FinSSL. The translators taking part in the study identify areas where lexical gaps occur and draw on different resources for filling in gaps. When filling in lexical gaps, the translators use both written Swedish and Finnish Sign Language as well as Swedish Sign Language and Finnish, thus showing a flexible view of linguistic borders not commonly recognised in Translation Studies (cf. Kuusi et al. 2022). Besides resources such as using dictionaries and contacting peers, the community of signers are given a normative role in the choice of signs for filling in gaps. In addition to a professional responsibility for the translation, the translators show moral responsibility in relation to the audience of the translation and in mediating information to the FinSSL community. However, they do not explicitly express a responsibility for the development of the language itself.

Key words: Finland-Swedish Sign Language, language making, lexical gaps, revitalisation, translation.

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1 Introduction

This article explores the role of translators in language revitalisation. More specifically, we elaborate on the concept of *Language Making* (Krämer, Vogl & Kolehmainen 2022) from the perspective of translators of the severely endangered Finland-Swedish Sign Language (FinSSL). The concept of Language Making describes processes of how linguistic units are collectively constructed and conceptualised as linguistic entities (ibid: 3). When translating into an endangered language such as FinSSL, translators are commonly forced to create solutions for filling in lexical gaps as part of their translation tasks. By doing this, they are inevitably involved in the process of Language Making (see Kuusi, Riionheimo & Kolehmainen 2022). In this paper we explore what strategies and linguistic resources FinSSL-translators use when reflecting on possible solutions for filling in lexical gaps in official translations.

Translating into endangered languages has so far received little attention in Translation Studies. Correspondingly, the role of translators has largely remained invisible in language revitalisation research (Kuusi, Kolehmainen & Riionheimo 2017). Moreover, the representation of Sign Languages (SLs) in all the mentioned fields is scarce due to the globally late recognition of SLs as "real languages" (Kusters, Green, Moriarty & Snoddon 2020). Despite this, translation plays an important role in many revitalising activities (ibid.) and translation has even been presented as a necessity for minority languages to retain their vitality and relevance as living languages (Cronin 1995: 89). In the case of FinSSL, translators represent some of the very few people who use the language in professional and public settings, and this highlights their role in the process of language development and standardisation. This crucial role of translators as agents of Language Making also raises the question of language responsibility when translating into an endangered language. Thus, this paper also pays attention to how FinSSL translators refer to responsibility in relation to their translational task as a part of language revitalisation.

2 On Finland Swedish Sign Language (FinSSL)

The Finnish Sign Language Act (359/2015) of 2015, recognises both FinSSL and Finnish Sign Language (FinSL). Due to a common history,[1] FinSL, FinSSL and Swedish Sign Language (SSL) are all closely related. The relation between the three languages has been described as a dialect continuum, comparable with the relation between the Scandinavian languages Swedish, Danish and Norwegian (Hoyer 2004). However, when SL research started in Finland in the 1980s, FinSSL was not identified as a language of its own, but as a variety used by pupils who had attended the Swedish deaf school in Porvoo [Sw. Borgå], Finland (Hoyer 2005). The first language documentation and description project in FinSSL was carried out within the Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD) between 1998 and 2002. The project resulted in the publication *Se vårt språk! Näe kielemme!* [See Our Language] (Hoyer & Kronlund-Saarikoski 2002), demonstrating characteristic features of the lexicon of FinSSL that differed from FinSL in 38 articles. In the same year, 2002, a separate club for Finland-Swedish signers called *Finlandssvenska teckenspråkiga rf* (FST) was founded, and in 2005 FST declared their language to be a language of its own (Hedrén, Hoyer, Londen, Wenman, Westerholm & Östman 2005).

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[1] For a more extensive description of the history of SL in Finland, see Salmi & Laakso 2005, and for the early history of FinSSL, see Lindberg 2021.

The changed status of FinSSL as a language in its own right, made it possible to introduce the context of language revitalisation. In 2013, FinSSL was labelled a *severely endangered language* according to UNESCO's criteria. This had an impact on decision-makers becoming aware of the gravity of the language situation. With the coming into force of the Sign Language Act in 2015, the Finnish Government thus began providing funding for language revitalisation. As a government-funded activity, FAD started offering language counselling services in both FinSSL and FinSL in 2019. In 2021, the University of Helsinki and the University of Jyväskylä were given shared research responsibility in FinSSL for a period of four years (see Salonen, Andersson-Koski, Hoyer & Jantunen 2022).
The raised awareness of FinSSL in Finnish society has led to a growing demand for translation and interpretation, as well as language knowledge and expertise. Concurrently, linguistic research in FinSSL is scarce, and the number of L1 users is diminishing. According to a report from 2015 the number of deaf signers in Finland is less than a hundred (Andersson-Koski 2015), compared to the estimation of 150 deaf signers in 2005 (Hedrén et al. 2005). Statistics on the number of people entitled to FinSSL interpretation services in 2022 show only four people in the age group 0–19 (Kela 2022). On the other hand, the number of both hearing and deaf *new signers* (De Meulder 2018, see also *new speaker* O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015) is increasing thanks to revitalising measures, and as a result the total number of signers today is estimated to be 200–300. As a small minority, FinSSL users are commonly in daily contact with Swedish, FinSL and Finnish, and some additionally with SSL. This increases the influence of the surrounding dominant languages, and at the same time the growing need for services and education in FinSSL calls for linguistic standardisation.

3 Theoretical Frameworks

Language revitalisation has been defined as "giving new life and vigour to a language that has been decreasing in use" (Hinton, Huss & Roche 2018: xxvi). The goal of revitalisation is thereby to increase the relative number of speakers, but also to extend the domains where the language is being used (Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 13). In the case of many endangered languages, extended domains are initially reached through translation, and as Kuusi et al. (2017: 138–9) point out, translation commonly also plays an essential role in several revitalising activities such "the development of written standards, vocabulary and learning materials for education". On the other hand, within Translation Studies, translating into minority languages has also been described as a paradox. Despite its significance in maintaining language vitality, translating into a minority language also carries the risk of unintentionally increasing interference from the dominant language in the subordinated endangered language (Cronin 1995: 89). In other words, translation might both strengthen and weaken a language in a suppressed power position.

Endangered languages are typically characterised by restricted linguistic domains leading to a lack of specialised terminology. In addition, endangered languages are often poorly documented, resulting in a modest availability of linguistic tools and resources. Hence, translators of endangered languages are occasionally forced to take the role of an "ad hoc terminologist" (Kuusi et al. 2022: 141) and create neologisms as part of their translation task. For this reason, Kuusi et al. (2022: 139) call translating into an endangered language "Language Making at its best". In addition to supporting the language "materially" by developing its vocabulary, translation also ideologically contributes to the conceptualisation of a language as a distinct linguistic unit separable from surrounding varieties or languages. Consequently, translation raises the status of a language while simultaneously indicating the existence of clear linguistic borders. In the same manner, language revitalisation emphasises the special value of a distinct linguistic entity that is worth preserving. Nevertheless, the study of Kuusi et al. (ibid) shows that translators of the autochthonous minority language Karelian, draw on *all* linguistic resources available to them when filling in lexical gaps as part of their translation tasks, and hence they display a flexible stance towards linguistic borders.

Translating into FinSSL means translating into an endangered language, but it also means moving from an auditory-oral (written) modality to a visual-gestural (signed) modality, resulting in audio-visual texts that are the products of translation (see Wurm 2014). For SLs, which lack established written forms, the development of video technology has in many ways revolutionised language documentation and communication. It has further enabled SL translations to be a natural part of government communication, at the same time evoking the demand for establishing terminology in several new domains (see also Vale & McKee 2022). In FinSSL there are very few resources to turn to when encountering challenging terminology. Nevertheless, translators are commonly forced to produce a demanding official translation in a short time, leaving them with great responsibility as language innovators. In comparison to the work of interpreters, solutions made by translators are more often preserved in publicly available video recordings, serving as a sort of a signed standard, and this emphasises the role of translators in SL standardisation. It also accentuates the issue of responsibility in FinSSL translation.

According to Östman & Solin (2016: 4) responsibility has to do with "how we position ourselves in context, in relation to our sense of ourselves, of agency, and in relation to our sense of others and of authority". When the concept of responsibility is discussed, there is often an initial distinction made between legal responsibility and moral responsibility (cf. Harmon 1995, Cane 2002, Östman & Solin 2016: 5, Östman 2023: 378). Legal responsibility follows from given rules in society that are often prescribed in legislation. Moral responsibility instead invokes moral judgements and implies the understanding of 'right' and 'wrong'.

Responsibility can also be attached to a social role, a professional position and to professional ethics in the workplace. In professional settings, responsibility can be analysed regarding accountabilities that professional practitioners are alleged to have in relation to clients, audiences, funders and other stakeholders (cf. Östman & Solin 2016: 5). Another perspective on responsibility is individual responsibility vs. collective responsibility (Östman 2023: 378), also referred to as personal vs. organisational or institutional responsibility. In Nordman's (2009: 274–275) study on legal translation and translation processes for legal bills, the translators taking part in the study express both an individual responsibility and a collective institutional responsibility, linked to the multi-institutional translation process. Responsibility can be further expressed explicitly or implicitly by means of linguistic features (Östman 2023: 379).

In Translation Studies the functional skopos theory (Reiss & Vermeer 1984, Nord 1991) brought in the concept of loyalty, denoting as Chesterman (2018: 3–4) points out, a moral principle of responsibility between people (e.g., translator – client). Pym (2012) discusses the translators' responsibility to oneself and to the translation profession as part of ethical perspectives on translation. In our study we are interested in how translators of FinSSL express and manifest their notion of responsibility in their professional role as translators in relation to their audience, clients and other stakeholders, and with regard to the language itself.

4 Data and Method

Our data consist of a semi-structured interview with two deaf SL translators translating from Swedish into FinSSL. The interview was video recorded using the communication platform Zoom and lasted one hour. The two authors, neither of whom was deaf, conducted the interviews and there was one SL Interpreter present translating from FinSSL into Swedish, as one of the authors did not know SL. Before the interview, the two translators were informed about the scope of the study and were given a short introduction to the concept of Language Making.

Both interviewees are experienced translators with more than 10 years of professional experience translating from Swedish (in Finland) into FinSSL. They both have SSL as their first SL, whilst FinSSL is their main professional language. Being deaf gives them a double role: they are part of the deaf FinSSL community in Finland, as well as official representatives (of institutions) in their professional role as translators. Both translators translate a variety of public texts by Finnish national authorities and organisations of general interest. These include e.g., National Health Authorities (THL, HUS), the Government and the Parliament, Kela (the Social Insurance Institution) and Suomi.fi, an online service portal that provides information and access to various government services and resources for individuals, businesses, and public organisations in Finland.

These digital platforms of authorities are all of great importance for the presentation and dissemination of signed translations to the users of signed languages in Finland. Thus, the translational context and translation task can be defined as institutional, and the texts being translated as institutional texts (see e.g., Koskinen 2008, Nordman 2009). These texts require high expertise in several fields and vocabulary in several languages for special purposes (LSP) which puts high demands on the translators. Interviews with only two translators makes our study primarily a qualitative case study. One must, however, take into consideration the specific conditions of FinSSL, which has very few signers and even fewer professional language experts. The two translators taking part in our study are in fact responsible for translating almost all official texts in Finland into FinSSL.

Discussing a very small community with an even smaller group of professional translators raises ethical considerations. We follow the ethical principles of TENK, the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. SLs as visual-gestural languages are a challenge when it comes to anonymising signers in research data (see e.g., Liebermann & Mayberry 2015: 293, Nyst 2015: 223, Siltaloppi 2023: 92–93). The translator can never in practice be totally anonymous in an SL translation as the translator's face is always shown. In this paper, however, we do not include examples that would reveal who the translators are, even though they have given us permission to use their names.

5 Results

In presenting the results of our study, we will begin by discussing the translators' reflections on domains and subject areas where they experience lexical gaps and will then turn to the resources (5.1.) and strategies (5.2) they use for filling in lexical gaps. We end the results section by focusing on responsibility and how different aspects of responsibility are understood and discussed by the translators.

5.1 The Domains of Lexical Gaps and the Resources used for filling them

The meaning of lexical gaps is not unambiguous when it comes to structurally different languages as Swedish and FinSSL. In Swedish, as an auditory-oral language, lexicalisation usually involves the introduction of encyclopaedic written forms of words into the dictionary. In SL research, however, lexicalisation is described by a gliding scale from non-, to partly and fully lexicalised signs (see e.g., Johnston 2011, Jantunen 2018). Commonly SL dictionaries do not cover the rich capacity of productive forms, resulting in the appearance of a large number of lexical gaps. In our study, we focus on societal concepts and Swedish content words that the FinSSL translators themselves identify as lexical gaps when translating official texts from Swedish to FinSSL.

The translators continually encounter lexical gaps, and they give several examples of areas where they occur: new phenomena in society; new technology; new official services in society; areas of specialised language not talked about on a regular basis or not covered by FinSSL; or areas not very well known to the translators and thus not part of their expertise (see Examples 1–3[2]).

(1) "The most difficult are new phenomena that don't have established signs, like new electronic devices, different concepts related to the Internet, new services...and of course, the Covid-19 pandemic."

(2) "Terminology connected to areas like hunting, agriculture, forestry and sports are difficult topics for me as I know nothing about them."

(3) "Difficult topics are those we don't talk about in everyday life, such as economics, politics and medical services and treatments."

From the interview data we could loosely categorise the areas of lexical gaps in terms of expressed reasons for lexical challenges when translating into FinSSL (Table 1, see also Vale & McKee 2022: 264). The categories should not be read as clear-cut separate categories. The purpose is to give a picture of how the translators express where lexical gaps occur and how they express where and when they face difficulties translating terms and vocabulary without having a given equivalent in FinSSL. We thus let the translators speak freely, and the categories follow the translator's understanding of areas of lexical gaps. A consequence of this approach is that some of the examples given by the translators could be put in more than one category. For example, lexical gaps in subject areas like economics, politics and sports, can both follow from a translator's subjective professional knowledge of a certain subject area, as well as from the fact that FinSSL does not (yet) have a commonly standardised or documented sign for a specific term. Due to endangerment and language attrition e.g., older generations of signers might have a joint knowledge about what FinSSL signs to use for different terms in society, but if they are not documented they might be unknown to younger generations of signers.

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[2] All interview responses cited in this paper were translated into English by the authors.

1 New phenomenon in society
E.g., Covid-19-related terminology and novelties (such as *coronavirus*, *quarantine*, *pandemic*), terminology related to new services (e.g., Oma Kanta/Mitt Kanta), electronic devices, Internet-related terminology.
2 Non-standardised or not documented signs for established terminology in society
Terminology that has been part of society for a long time but does not have a standardised sign in FinSSL or is new to FinSSL. E.g., Pääministeri/Statsminister (*Prime Minister*), lastenneuvola/barnrådgivning (*child health care clinic*).
3 New areas of expertise to the translator
Terminology or special lexicon in relation to the translator's professional expertise: special areas not very well known to the translator, gaps in the translator's knowledge of the specialised domains. E.g., sports, agriculture, politics, economics, medical treatments.

Table 1. Categories of lexical gaps when translating into FinSSL according to translators

In Table 1, we firstly have terminology for new phenomena of different kinds in society (neologisms) or existing terminology that is given an extended meaning. Here we e.g. find terminology in relation to Covid-19, that besides new terminology (*coronavirus, social distancing*) also covered reasonably common terms (*epidemic*, *vaccine*), whilst others would have previously had limited use beyond the medical or scientific community (*negative pressure room*) (cf. Vale & McKee 2022: 264). Other examples are the names of different new services in society, such as the online medical services provided by the National Health Authorities *Oma Kanta* (Swe. *Mitt Kanta*). This example is discussed further in section 5.2. Secondly, we have terminology established in the (written) national languages of Finland (Finnish and Swedish), but that does not yet have a standardised or documented sign in FinSSL or is new to FinSSL. This category covers terminology from different specialised domains and subject areas with a specialised language. Examples are *Prime Minister* and *the national child health care clinic* (see section 5.2). Thirdly, we find lexical gaps in relation to the translator's own expertise and knowledge of specific domains and subjects. Lexical gaps in the last two categories can also relate to the translator's knowledge of FinSSL and its history or knowledge of older, undocumented signs.

The translators use a variety of resources for filling in lexical gaps as part of the translation task. They start by mentioning the two dictionaries available in FinSSL; *Signwiki* and *Suvi*. Signwiki is an open collaborative dictionary where anyone can add entries of signs, hence working more or less like Wikipedia. Nevertheless, most entries are made by persons associated with FAD. The FinSSL Signwiki database was introduced in 2013, and today contains over 3,000 pages of signs. Suvi, again, is the first online SL dictionary in Finland, originally published in FinSL, but updated in 2015 with a FinSSL section containing the 38 articles from the publication *Se vårt språk! Näe kielemme!* (see section 2). As part of the digitalisation, homonyms from the printed publication were separated into 70 articles in Suvi. Since 2019, the FinSSL section in Suvi has been updated with new signs by SL counsellors at FAD, and today contains 229 articles, although this still only covers a small part of distinctive FinSSL signs.

Besides SL dictionaries, the translators also mention dictionaries in a broader sense, without specifying what kind of dictionaries are meant. We assume, however, that they refer to Swedish monolingual dictionaries. As Vale and McKee (2022: 266–267) point out, although unrelated in both modality and structure, SLs are influenced by the spoken languages that surround them, and calques from spoken languages are therefore relatively common, which explains the use of dictionaries for written languages.

Discussing with peers is mentioned as another important resource. The interviewees discuss both with each other, as well as with representatives of language counselling services. In addition, they specifically mention asking the community and other signers in a broad sense who are members of Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Hence, other signers and their established use of a sign seem to be given a normative value. Borrowing is also mentioned as a resource, covering both borrowing from already existing translations as well as borrowing from other SLs. Turning to existing translations to solve translation problems and lexical challenges is a common practice for translators (whenever one can be assured that the existing translation is of high quality) in the same way as parallel texts can be used as resources. In this context, however, all parallel texts are translations, and it is worth recognising that the existing official translations in the context studied here are in fact products by the same translators now "re-using" them as resources. They are thus giving their own translations, at least partly, a normative value. Borrowing between national SLs and closely related SLs is a common phenomenon (see e.g., Vale & McKee 2022: 266). In the case of FinSSL, borrowing from other SLs covers borrowing from FinSL and SSL. Borrowing is also discussed by our two translators when discussing strategies for filling in lexical gaps and this issue will be discussed further in the following section.

5.2 The Translators' Reflections on Strategies for filling in Lexical Gaps

The translators in our data bring up different approaches to dealing with lexical gaps. The strategies that they mention include the creation of *neologisms*, the use of *loan signs* from other SLs, and the use of *calques* from written languages. Although the

need for neologisms is touched upon several times, a more specific example of creating new signs for new phenomena arises only in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Example 4*,* Translator 2 (T2) mentions that a strategy of hers during the pandemic was to add an explanation and then *suggest* a sign.

> (4) "Sometimes, if there is a new word with no sign, I add an explanation and then suggest a sign. That was something I thought of in relation to Covid 19 terminology. And sometimes I needed to change the signs along the way. That is part of the process."

The pandemic generated a need to create new terminology rapidly in all languages, worldwide. In Example 4 no specific word or sign is mentioned, but the citation shows that T2 clearly takes an active role in introducing new terminology. In another dataset of our project, when we discussed lexical gaps with FinSSL counselling representatives, they mention several signs connected to the pandemic as examples of especially challenging lexical gaps. Among these, the sign CORONA VIRUS[3] (Signwiki), imitating the microscopic appearance of the virus, is mentioned as an international strategy filling in a gap that is also used by FinSSL. The sign was widely adopted into several SLs at the beginning of the pandemic (Vale & Mc Kee 2022: 267).

The use of borrowings as both *loan signs* from other SLs and *calques* from written languages are strategies for which the translators provide additional specific examples. Both translators also express a tolerant stance towards loans, especially when it comes to culturally specific terminology. T2 indicates this by saying that "It's ok to borrow a SSL sign if it relates to a Swedish phenomenon, for example the Swedish deaf community." Translator 1 (T1) articulates similar thoughts by bringing up FinSL loans for phenomena related to Finnish deaf culture. She also develops her thoughts by raising the language use of the community in Example 5.

> (5) "I think you can borrow from other Sign Languages if it's a sign that the deaf community uses. I see Finnish signs that are already a part of everyday life. Then it is impossible to change that, to force upon people a new Finland-Swedish sign just to follow that language. So I use the sign that is most frequent within the community."

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[3] In this article, we follow the convention of representing signs with capitalised glosses.

In Example 5 it is interesting that T1, in addition to showing a great openness to linguistic flexibility, further refers to the community as a norm. By using signs that she most frequently sees among other signers, she simultaneously takes a more passive stance towards deciding on terminology herself. In relation to the example, T1 mentions a sign used for the child health care clinic (in Swedish *barnrådgivning*)*,* a service in Finland monitoring a child's health and development and providing parents with guidance. The sign commonly used for the child health care clinic in FinSSL is a loan from FinSL (in Finnish *neuvola*). The FinSL sign NEUVOLA (Suvi, FinSL) additionally bears the meaning of *baby, infant* or *toddler*, which is not found in FinSSL. T1 remembers discussing a possible FinSSL equivalent with the child health care clinic, finally concluding that the task was impossible as the FinSL loan sign "is already rooted among FinSSL users".

In the case of a severely endangered language such as FinSSL, the approach of using signs *most frequently seen* within the community is, however, not without its problems. Due to both late recognition and the loss of linguistic environments, FinSSL has over the last few decades been highly influenced by surrounding languages, especially by FinSL. If the translator "mirrors" the language seen within the community without due consideration, there is a risk that she unintentionally contributes to increasing the influences from FinSL by introducing Finnish signs as part of the FinSSL lexicon in official translations. However, in relation to this specific example (5), the translator shows a conscious strategy to implement a FinSL loan by arguing that using an established sign is preferable to a new coinage.

The third strategy dealing with lexical gaps is introduced by a discussion about what FinSSL sign to use when referring to the *Prime Minister*. In Example 6, T1 mentions the demanding situation that translators face when key terminology is not found in any dictionary.

> (6) "Some terminology I want to check up just in case. For example, the sign for Prime Minister. Should I use HEAD MINISTER (Finnish: pääministeri) or STATE MINISTER (Swedish: statsminister). It would be easy just to check it up, but the sign is not yet in any dictionary."

Here T1 mentions two alternative strategies. The first one is to use the FinSL loan sign PÄÄ-MINISTERI (Suvi, FinSL), a sign that can be seen as a calque from the Finnish word with the literal meaning of *head minister*. The second strategy is to use the sign STAT-MINISTER, originating in the Swedish word *statsminister*, literally meaning *state minister*. As Hoyer (2004) points out, many clear differences between FinSSL and FinSL derive from language contact between Swedish and Finnish. The Swedish influence in FinSSL can be seen in mouth patterns, fingerspelling, and semantics, but also in loan translations found in compounds and fixed phrases (ibid: 12–17). When later in the discussion T2 comments on the example by stating that “My principle is to follow the Swedish basis, so I sign STAT-MINISTER”, this alludes to the link between FinSSL and written Swedish.

However, for someone who is not familiar with the Finnish word *pääministeri,* compounding head and minister can be seen as a logical way to visualise ‘the most important’ or ‘main’ minister (compare e.g., the Swedish word *huvudperson* meaning *“*head person”). As T1 stresses that her Finnish is weak, it is possible that she does not see the use of *head* as a Finnish influence, but rather as a logical metaphorical solution that she often sees in use in her surroundings, which are dominantly FinSL. Interestingly, none of the translators, despite their Swedish background, refer to the diverging SSL sign for prime minister as a possible solution. Example 6 reflects the challenging situation working with a non-standardised language, here resulting in two strategies that use different resources to fill in the same lexical gap. In the end, this might lead to various possible signs used for the same concept in official texts.

When discussing language contact it is worth keeping in mind that Swedish, despite its national status, is a minority language in Finland. Consequently, most of the Swedish source texts that T1 and T2 translate are originally translated from Finnish. In our data, the minority language perspective is part of the discussion concerning e.g., how to translate the proper name of the digital platform used for health services, *Oma Kanta* in Finnish and *Mitt Kanta* in Swedish, both names equally official. In relation to this platform, T2 defends fingerspelling the Finnish name when translating topics related health care (7).

> (7) “There are topics, such as health care, where everybody uses a Finnish word, both in FinSSL and FinSL. I can't change that, because if a deaf person wants to check it up, they need to know the correct term. For example, Oma Kanta.”

In Example 7*,* T2 motivates fingerspelling the Finnish name of the platform by pointing out that *Oma Kanta* is more familiar to “all” Finns. In addition to referring to the Finnish name as the one used “by everyone”, she also calls it the *correct one*. However, as both the Finnish name and the Swedish name have the same official status, the translator has the option of choosing which language version to use as a source language for the linguistic transfer of the proper name. By introducing the Finnish name as correct, T2 simultaneously contradicts her earlier statement on “always following a Swedish basis”.

Nonetheless, during the process of writing this article, the Swedish name of the platform has in fact been changed from “Mina Kanta-sidor” to “Mitt Kanta”. As the new name will be implemented in stages,[4] both versions still appear on different pages, making the Swedish term less accurate than the Finnish one, which has undergone only a minimal orthographic change as part of the update. As Swedish is a minority language that is often offered through translations, this also affects the solutions adopted by FinSSL translators. Example 7 does not reveal whether T2 is aware of the official Swedish name or not, but the example illustrates the need for translators to master terminology in vastly different domains, but also to do it in several different languages in order to be able to make conscious decisions about translational solutions that might have a significant influence on FinSSL.

To sum up, the two interviewed translators mention strategies such as creating neologisms, using loan signs and calques to fill in lexical gaps. Interestingly, the examples focus on language-external resources, while neither of them brings up language-internal strategies, such as using semantic extension, paraphrasing, restructuring and so on (cf. Vale & McKee 2022). As Examples 4–7 show, both translators draw on a wide range of linguistic resources and display a flexible stance towards linguistic borders when filling in gaps. Languages mentioned as resources are FinSSL and Swedish, as well as FinSL and Finnish.

As the source texts in Swedish that the translators face commonly also represent translations, knowledge of both Finnish and FinSL is sometimes a necessity to produce accurate translations. Despite this, T1 explicitly states that she "only uses FinSSL sources", as she mentions that her Finnish is too weak to check up equivalents in FinSL. However, T1 primarily brings up examples where she uses FinSL loans when facing lexical gaps. Although she is proficient in SSL, T1 states that she "doesn't dare" to consider SSL-inspired solutions because she once received negative feedback on her FinSSL translations, including "wrong signs" – meaning signs belonging to SSL. T2, on the other hand, mentions comparing signs in all three SLs, and also making searches in both Swedish and Finnish. When solving gaps, she clearly expresses the principle of following a "Swedish basis". But having said that, she refers to the Finnish name as *the correct one* in relation to the healthcare platform, instead of the official Swedish name. In other words, we can note contradictions in both translators' reflections. The data also exemplify that the translators partly apply different strategies to fill the same gap, potentially resulting in various concepts in official texts. This triggers the question of agency and responsibility when standardisation and Language Making through translation are concerned.

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[4] News published 28.2.2023 on Kela's webpage https://www.kela.fi/news-archive/5228908/the-name-of-the-my-kanta-pages-service-is-changing-and-will-now-be-called-mykanta (cited 9.5.2023)

5.3 The Translators' Reflections on Responsibility

Responsibility is referred to in several ways by the translators in their interviews. They both express feeling a *personal responsibility* for the translation task and a *professional responsibility* as professional translators in mediating correct information to the FinSSL community (cf. Pym (2012) on the translators' responsibility to oneself and to the translation profession). When asked whether they feel a responsibility for the language itself, T1 answers that she feels a huge responsibility ("jag känner ett jättestort ansvar"), "especially with more demanding texts". She adds that she does not like having this responsibility, implying that the responsibility is *given* to her, not taken up by her. T2 also answers that she feels a great responsibility but adds that "over time it has become easier to take that responsibility" and continues by giving examples of how she handles translation problems, e.g., by adding explanations to new terminology. T2 has been working as a translator for a longer time than T1. It is noticeable here that T2 uses the sign *take*, not *have*, thus implying a more active role. Thus, both respond to the question by linking their answers to the practical work of translation, but neither of them elaborates on a more general linguistic responsibility for the language or its development. Both T1 and T2 mention that they usually contact and discuss translation problems, such as lexical gaps, "with many people", which implicitly implies a *collective responsibility* (as discussed in e.g., Östman 2023: 378).

None of the translators specifically refer to an institutional responsibility as in representing an institution and creating an institutional product. This is interesting as it differs from previous studies on institutional translation, where both an institutional responsibility and a personal responsibility are expressed by translators (Nordman 2009: 274–275) and the translation is often primarily seen as a product of the institution (cf. Koskinen 2008, Nordman 2009). This might be at least partly explained by the working conditions for SL translators who translate official texts. They have several authorities as clients and are directly employed by the clients (authorities) they translate for, although they work on a freelance basis. Our dataset does not, however, allow us to draw further conclusions on this question.

Responsibility for the FinSSL is implied in a moral sense, not a legal sense, and the discussions indicate a certain degree of ambiguity. The two translators do express what can be identified as a *moral responsibility* to the receivers of the translations in a collective sense (cf. Chesterman (2018: 3–4) on moral responsibility between translator and client) – the translation enabling the FinSSL deaf community to gain information and participate in society. They do not, however, refer to themselves as Language Makers, nor do they explicitly state that they have a role in the process of language standardisation. The concept of Language Making was nonetheless introduced to them at the beginning of the interview, and Language Making is discussed in terms of how the translators fill in lexical gaps. They are also somewhat reluctant to take a personal stand on questions about how resources and strategies for filling in lexical gaps should be prioritised, which rather confirms their unwillingness to take on a more pronounced role in Language Making.

6 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Lexical gaps when translating into a non-standardised endangered language like FinSSL clearly puts high demands on translators. In this paper we have discussed how lexical gaps are addressed by FinSSL translators, what resources and strategies they use to fill the gaps and what they think about responsibility in relation to a translation task, their professional role and to FinSSL as a severely endangered language. The study shows that translators play an essential role in Language Making when filling in lexical gaps as part of a translation task.

The two interviewed translators identified a range of strategies for filling in lexical gaps. Language-external strategies, such as loaning signs from other SL and using calques from Swedish as well as Finnish, are mentioned and accepted by the translators. Introducing new signs by creating neologisms is also mentioned where filling in lexical gaps was concerned. Drawing on several linguistic strategies shows a flexible view of linguistic borders in line with what Kuusi et al. (2022) acknowledge is the case with translators of the endangered language Karelian. In relation to borrowing signs, surprisingly, using SSL as a resource is presented as less preferable, especially by one of the translators, who says she has received negative feedback on translations that have too much interference from SSL.

Despite presenting several strategies for filling in gaps, there seems to be a lack of agreement about how resources should be prioritised by the two translators, which might affect lexical consistency in official translations. As shown in the examples given in our paper, the two translators present partly different strategies for filling in the same lexical gap, which might potentially result in inconsistent terminology in official texts. The translators, moreover, sometimes contradict themselves, which indicates a lack of normative lexical agreements. It also accentuates a need for conscious, agreed upon decisions in terms of lexical choice and strategies for filling in lexical gaps. Further, it indicates a need for more organised teamwork, which is enhanced by the contextual framework of translating into a non-standardised, severely endangered language that is exposed to language attrition. This is, for example, exemplified by the fact that earlier generations of FinSSL signers might share a consensus about what signs to use for a specific term, which younger generations are not aware of.

Both translators express several forms of responsibility, both explicitly and implicitly. Overall, the responsibilities expressed can be described as primarily moral and, to a lesser extent, legal. The feeling of responsibility, on both a personal and a professional level, encompasses the translation task and the task of mediating information to the community. In relation to lexical gaps, T1 and T2 imply a collective responsibility by emphasising that they contact "many people" to find solutions to translation problems.

The two translators in our study are responsible for more or less all official translations into FinSSL. Through this enormous translation task, they produce official texts that might be considered normative when it comes to lexical choice and act as models for future translations. Inevitably, this gives the translators an essential role in "making language" as part of revitalising FinSSL. In relation to their professional role, the translators do express a feeling of huge responsibility. But having said that, none of them identify as Language Makers, nor do they explicitly express a sense of responsibility for developing FinSSL as part of revitalisation.

Although the two translators in our study do not elaborate on linguistic responsibility, their crucial role in Language Making cannot be ignored. If translators do not acknowledge their influence on the language and their role as Language Makers, there is a risk that some of their practices and strategies, such as unacknowledged loans and calques, might ultimately weaken FinSSL as a language of its own. However, particularly an endangered language context is commonly characterised by an enormous workload carried out by a few individuals. To take on a further pronounced and conscious responsibility for the development and future of the language itself, might feel overwhelming. At the same time, this situation makes it even more important to create structures that enable stakeholders working with the language to come together, discuss language matters, and agree upon how responsibilities are assigned to different roles.

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