

A Study of Tense, Aspect and Modality in the French Translation of *The Economists' Warning* by *The Financial Times*

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Summary - Translation is the transfer of meaning from a source language to a target language. This transfer is done through sentences. Sentence meaning is conveyed through words, tenses, aspects and modals. This paper focuses on tenses, aspects and modals as elements of sentence semantics. The choice of these elements in the target language is complex most of the time because there is no perfect fit between them in two languages.

Résumé - La traduction est le transfert de sens d'une langue source à une langue cible. Ce transfert se fait à travers des phrases. Le sens d'une phrase est véhiculé par les mots, le temps, l'aspect et la modalité. Cet article met l'accent sur le temps, l'aspect et la modalité en tant qu'éléments constitutifs de la sémantique de la phrase. Le choix de ces éléments dans la langue cible est complexe la plupart du temps parce qu'il n'y a pas de correspondance parfaite entre eux dans deux langues différentes.

1. Introduction

The point that this discussion on the French translation of *The Economists Warning* is making is that translation is a semantic exercise in which meaning is expressed mostly at sentence and word levels. It is specifically sentence semantics that the paper is studying through the tenses, the aspects and the modals used in the story and the translation. The contribution of syntax to sentence meaning as demonstrated by MAK Halliday will be discussed in another paper.

It is difficult to say that a particular English tense should be translated into French by a particular tense. For example, the translation of the Past Tense into French poses problems because the choice of the French tense depends on the nature or the kind of story (newspaper or historical narrative) as well as on the context.

This takes us to another level of difficulty which is the notion of aspect. This notion depends on the tense of the verb. Different tenses imply different aspects and different aspects have different meanings.

A third level of sentence semantics is the modality. Modals have specific meanings which shape the meaning of the sentence.

Let us see how these three notions contribute to shape the sentences' meaning in the translation of *The Economists Warning*.

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1. Tense

1.1. Definition of the notion of tense

In *Semantics*, some aspects of meaning that belong to the level of the sentence are discussed by John I. Saeed who notes that:

"One aspect is the marking of time, known as **tense**. How this is marked varies from language to language: it might be marked on a verb in languages like English or by special time words as in Chinese, as shown below:¹¹⁸

- a. Tā xiànzài yǒu kè
He now have classes
'He now has classes.'
- b. Tā zuótiān yǒu kè
He yesterday have classes
'He had classes yesterday'
- c. Tā míngtiān yǒu kè
He tomorrow have classes
'He will have classes tomorrow'

In this example, the verb *yǒu* 'has/have' does not change form: the time reference is given by the time words, *xiànzài* 'now', *zuótiān* 'yesterday' and *míngtiān* 'tomorrow'. However, unlike the Chinese verb, the English verb changes form and gives the new forms 'has', 'had' and 'will have'.

This system of division of time into past, present and future tenses is less complicated than the system of division of the Bantu language Chibemba¹¹⁹:

Chibemba past tense system

- a. Remote past:
Ba-àli-bomb-ele 'They worked (before yesterday)'
- b. Removed past:
Ba-àlii-bomba 'They worked (yesterday)'
- c. Near past:
Ba-àci-bomba 'They worked (earlier today)'
- d. Immediate past:
Ba-á-bomba 'They worked (in the past few hours)'

Chibemba future tense system

- a. Immediate future:
Ba-ááá-bomba 'They'll work (in the next few hours)'
- b. Near future
Ba-léé-bomba 'They'll work (later today)'
- c. Removed future
Ba-kà-bomba 'They'll work (tomorrow)'
- d. Remote future
Ba-ká-bomba 'They'll work (after tomorrow)'

¹¹⁸Tiee (1986: 90)

¹¹⁹Givon: 1972

In this tense system there are four degrees of remoteness from the act of speaking: a few hours from now; within today; within the day adjacent to today; and beyond the day adjacent to today¹²⁰.

The notion of immediate past and remote past as well as that of immediate future and remote future are not specific to Chibemba even if they are more stressed in this Bantu language. In ancient French, the *passé simple* was compulsorily used to narrate events that occurred more than 24 hours earlier but today the *passé composé* performs this function in speeches, reports and newspapers.

In a chapter entitled Notes on English Tenses, W. Stannard Allen points out in Living English Structure that: "English has three main time divisions, Past, Present and Future, expressed by the simple tenses. They should be shown as forming three main blocks of tenses, each being subdivided so as to express other aspects within its general time"¹²¹.

In the French language, the three main blocks of tenses also exist and that is what Benveniste explains in Chapter XIX of his book entitled *Problèmes de linguistique générale*:

L'ensemble des formes personnelles du verbe français est traditionnellement réparti entre un certain nombre de paradigmes temporels dénommés « présent », « imparfait », « passé défini », etc., et ceux-ci à leur tour se distribuent selon les trois grandes catégories du temps, présent, passé, futur¹²².

The notion that time is subdivided into three blocks, past, present and future, and that each block includes temporal paradigms is underlined in the above-mentioned quotation in French.

The definition of the notion of tense is further explored by Harald Weinrich who recalls in his book *Le temps* (Tempus in the German version) that in the beginning, there was only one word: chronos. In Greek, this word meant Time and also some verb forms (i.e. tenses). The Latin word Tempus refers not only to an extra-linguistic phenomenon but also to a set of linguistic forms which are called Tempora in German. Many European languages use similar terms, e.g. *Temps* in French, *Tempo* in Italian, *Tiempo* in Spanish, *Tempo* in Portuguese. Furthermore, the corresponding adjectives qualify the verb tenses and the Time as well. In some other languages there are two different words: German has Zeit (time) and tempus (tense); English has time and tense. Further, Harald Weinrich makes a remark which will be quite important for this study of tenses across several European languages. *La fonction d'un temps doit être établie spécialement pour chaque langue. C'est un principe absolu*¹²³.

The main idea of this quotation is that the function of a tense should be specific to each language, and this is an absolute principle.

¹²⁰ Saeed (2009: 127-128)

¹²¹ Allen (1974: 75)

¹²² Benveniste (1966: 237)

¹²³ Weinrich (1973: 11)

Focus on several instances of the Present Perfect, the Pluperfect and the Past tense used in the *Economists' Warning* and their translation into French

Table 1. 1st example

French	English	Remarks on the tenses
La crise de l'emploi frappe avant tout les pays-membres périphériques de l'Union monétaire européenne, dans lesquels une augmentation exceptionnelle du nombre des faillites est également en cours, tandis que l'Allemagne et les autres pays centraux de la zone euro ont connu une croissance sur le front de l'emploi.	The employment crisis strikes above all the peripheral member countries of the European Monetary Union, where an exceptional rise in bankruptcy is also under way, whereas Germany and the other central countries of the Eurozone have instead witnessed growth on the job front.	French: passé composé English: Present Perfect

The tenses used in this example are: *Passé composé* (French) and Present perfect (English)

Comments: There is a sort of correspondence between French and English in this particular example because the *passé composé* and the Present Perfect refer to a situation that is completed and the action is connected to now (or the speech time). "The employment crisis strikes above all the peripheral member countries ... whereas Germany and the other central countries of the eurozone have instead witnessed growth on the job front". It is important to note that the growth that is referred to is still apparent at the time this statement is made.

Here we are not interested in the action but in the completed fact and its relationship to a given general time aspect. About the Present Perfect, Allen gives the following explanation:

When we say, for example, I've bought a new hat, we are calling attention to the present possession of the article and not the previous act of buying... The form I have bought is naturally considered in relation to NOW... The Present Perfect therefore expresses the completion or 'perfection' of an action by NOW¹²⁴.

About the relationship between *Passé composé* and Present Perfect, Chuquet makes the following comment in *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction*:

"Le seul cas de correspondance est celui où l'on a dans les deux langues un procès envisagé comme accompli par rapport au moment de l'énonciation, soit en l'absence de toute détermination temporelle :
Un paysage politique qui a beaucoup plus **changé** qu'on ne le supposait/
A political landscape which **has changed** much more than we had supposed.¹²⁵"

¹²⁴ Allen (1974 : 76-77)

¹²⁵ Chuquet (1987 : 99)

Table 2. 2nd example

Comme l' avait présagé une partie de la communauté académique, la crise est révélatrice d'un certain nombre de contradictions dans les institutions et les politiques de l'Union monétaire européenne.	As foreseen by part of the academic community, the crisis is revealing a number of contradictions in the institutions and policies of the European Monetary Union.	French : Plus-que-parfait English: past participle
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French: Plus-que-parfait

English: past participle

Comments: It is worth noting that the plus-que-parfait and the past participle are used in this example. It is important to underline the complexity of the correspondence of the tense system across languages. The use of *plus-que-parfait* in this case is not compulsory because this tense is normally used to show that an action occurred and was completed before another action in the past.

Table 3. 3rd example

Les autorités européennes ont pris une série de décisions qui, en réalité et contrairement aux annonces, ont contribué à aggraver la récession et à creuser les écarts entre les pays membres.	The European authorities have taken a series of decisions that have in actual fact, contrary to announcements, helped to worsen the recession and widen the gaps between the member countries.	French : passé composé (x2) English : Present Perfect (x2)
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The tenses used in this example are *passé composé* and the Present Perfect.

Comments: It is obvious that in both languages, the perfective aspect is apparent in this example. The perfect is a semantic feature shared by the tenses used in both languages.

Table 4. 4th example

En juin 2010, lorsque les premiers signes de crise de la zone euro sont devenus évidents, une lettre paraphée par trois cents économistes souligné les dangers inhérents des politiques d'austérité, qui ne feraient que déprimer la demande de biens et de services ainsi que l'emploi et les revenus, rendant dès lors le remboursement des dettes, tant publiques que privées, encore plus difficile.	In June 2010, when the first signs of the eurozone crisis became apparent, a letter signed by three hundred economists pointed out the inherent dangers of austerity policies, which would further depress the demand for goods and services as well as employment and incomes, thus making the payment of debts, both public and private, still more difficult.	French : Passé composé (x2) + conditional English: past tense (x2) + conditional
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The tenses used are *passé composé* and the Past tense.

Comments: Is there a match between the Past tense and the *passé composé*? The function of the *passé composé* is different from that of a proper past tense. In French, the substantive past tenses are *imparfait*, *passé simple* and *plus-que-parfait*. In the light of this, why is the *passé composé* used to translate the English Past tense? According to Weinrich, the *passé composé* is used in speeches, reports and minutes to narrate past events. This is what Benveniste has to say about the concept of “discours” (speech).

“Il faut entendre discours dans sa plus large extension : toute énonciation supposant un locuteur et un auditeur, et chez le premier l’intention d’influencer l’autre en quelque manière. C’est d’abord la diversité des discours oraux de toute nature et de tout niveau, de la conversation triviale à la harangue la plus ornée. Mais c’est aussi la masse des écrits qui reproduisent des discours oraux ou qui en empruntent le tour et les fins : correspondances, mémoires, théâtre, ouvrages didactiques, bref tous les genres où quelqu’un s’adresse à quelqu’un, s’énonce comme locuteur et organise ce qu’il dit dans la catégorie de la personne.”¹²⁶

In an example mentioned above, we noted that there was a point of coincidence between the *passé composé* and the Present Perfect. However, it is important to note that unlike the *passé composé*, the present perfect has no past tense function. Allen speaks authoritatively about this issue when he says that perhaps the names Before-past, Before-present and Before-future might be more reasonable names than Perfect, because this name is given to a tense made in the same way as the English Present Perfect in many other European languages. But with most of these languages, the distinction between Past Simple (Preterite) and Present Perfect has been lost, so that we have a confusion that is not possible in English.

“The form of the English Present Perfect is now commonly used in other languages as a sort of colloquial past, and it is very difficult to stamp out the foreign student’s desire to use the English tense in the same way. Compare the following random examples. In English the tense must change too:

Je l’ai vu (hier).
L’ho visto (ieri).
Amvāzut-o (eri).
Ich habe ihn (gestern) gesehen.
Viděljsem ho (včera).¹²⁷

Most authors admit that the *passé composé* is used in correspondences, memoirs, drama, didactic books, etc. Benveniste underlines that:

Il faut surtout souligner les trois temps fondamentaux du discours : présent, futur et parfait. Nous appelons “parfait” la classe entière des formes composées (avec avoir et être), dont la fonction consiste à présenter la notion comme accomplie par rapport au moment considéré, et la situation actuelle résultant de cet accomplissement temporalisé.¹²⁸

The use of the *passé composé* to narrate an event which took place several years ago was not possible in ancient French. Indeed, Weinrich (1973: 297) recalls that in the 16th

¹²⁶Benveniste (1966 : 241-242)

¹²⁷Allen (1974: 77)

¹²⁸Benveniste (1966 : 243-246)

century, there was a violent conflict of linguistic precedence. The humanist and theoretician of philosophy Henri Estienne was one of the most passionate champions of the French language who used to compare it to the Italian language. In *Traicté de la conformité du langage française avec le grec* (1569), he explained the difference between *Passé simple* and *Passé composé*. When somebody said “Je PARLAY à luy et luy FEI response, the listener had to understand that the action took place before the day it was reported on. On the contrary “J’AY PARLE à luy et luy AY FAICT response” meant that the conversation took place on the same day. This was called the “24-hour rule” (la règle des 24 heures) according to which any event dating back to more than 24 hours was narrated in the *passé simple*. The *Passé composé* was commonly used to refer to an immediate past, while the *Passé simple* referred to a remote past. Estienne was inspired by Garnier’s theory according to which the *passé simple* was used with adverbs such as “*dernièrement, hier, jadis*”, whereas the *passé composé* was used with adverbs like “*aujourd’hui, déjà, maintenant*”. 16th Century grammarians passed down the 24-hour rule to the following century. Maupas (1607), Oudin (1632) and later Buffier (1709) used to apply this rule. However, by the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century, the *passé simple* was no longer used in oral conversations and even lost certain narrative functions. The French Revolution contributed to the precedence of the *passé composé*. The January 1, 1813 issue of the ‘*Journal de Paris*’ published on the front page the news of a cabinet meeting presided over by the Emperor on December 30, 1812. The meeting took place two days earlier but the tense that was used to report on it was the *passé composé*. Further, there were other stories in the newspaper dating back to November and December 1812 and narrated in the *passé composé*. Actually, the *passé composé* was purposely used to give the impression that the stories were quite current and fresh.

Table 5. 5th example

Cette alerte est cependant restée lettre morte.	This alarm was , however unheeded.	French : passé composé English : Past tense
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The *passé composé* is used in French, whereas the Past tense is used in English.

Comments: There are two things that need to be underlined in the use of these tenses: past action (past tense) and completed action (*passé composé*).

Table 6. 6th example

Les autorités européennes ont préféré adopter la doctrine fantaisiste de « l’austérité expansive », selon laquelle les coupes budgétaires restaureraient la confiance des marchés dans la solvabilité des pays de l’UE et conduiraient ainsi à une baisse des taux d’intérêt et à une reprise économique.	The European authorities preferred to adopt the fanciful doctrine of “expansive austerity”, according to which budget cuts would restore the markets’ confidence in the solvency of the EU countries and thus lead to a drop in interest rates and economic recovery.	French : passé composé English : past tense
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The *passé composé* is used whereas the past tense is used in English.

Comments: The Past tense refers to an action or event which occurred in the past and which is not connected to now (or the speech time). It may be surprising to note that the *passé composé* is used in the French language to translate the past tense. That is why Allen says that the use of this tense in this context is confusing and not possible in English.

Table 7. 7th example

Comme le Fonds monétaire international le reconnaît lui-même, nous savons aujourd'hui que les politiques d'austérité ont en fait aggravé la crise, provoquant un effondrement des revenus au-delà des attentes les plus répandues.	As the International Monetary Fund itself recognises, we know today that the policies of austerity have actually deepened the crisis, causing a collapse of incomes in excess of the most widely-held expectations	French: passé composé English: Present Perfect
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The *passé composé* is used in French whereas the Present Perfect is used in English.

Comments: The tenses used in this example are in agreement. The perfective aspect is shared by both tenses.

Table 8. 8th example

Les politiques déflationnistes appliquées en Allemagne et ailleurs, pour accumuler des excédents commerciaux, ont contribué pendant des années, avec d'autres facteurs, à la création d'énormes déséquilibres entre pays débiteurs et pays créditeurs au sein de la zone euro.	The deflationary policies applied in Germany and elsewhere to build up trade surpluses have worked for years, together with other factors, to create huge imbalances in debt and credit between the eurozone countries.	French : passé composé English : Present Perfect
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The *passé composé* is again used in French and the Present Perfect is used in English.

Comments: The tenses used in this example are in agreement. The perfective aspect is shared by both tenses.

Table 9. 9th example

John Maynard Keynes s'est opposé au Traité de Versailles en 1919 en ces termes clairvoyants : «Si nous partons du principe que l'Allemagne doit rester pauvre et ses enfants affamés et paralysés [...] Si nous cherchons délibérément l'appauvrissement de l'Europe centrale, la vengeance, j'ose le prédire, ne claudiquera pas».	John Maynard Keynes opposed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 with these far-sighted words: "If we take the view that Germany must be kept impoverished and her children starved and crippled [...] If we aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe, vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp."	French: passé composé English: Past Tense
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The *passé composé* is used to translate the Past tense.

Comments: In this example, the *passé composé* is used again to translate the past tense. The function that it performs in this story has been explained by Benvenist and Harald Weinrich.

Table 10. 10th example

Même si les positions sont désormais inversées, avec les pays de la périphérie dans une situation désespérée et l'Allemagne dans une position relativement avantageuse, la crise actuelle présente plus d'une similitude avec cette terrible phase historique, qui a créé les conditions de la montée du nazisme et de la Seconde guerre mondiale.	Even though the positions are now reversed, with the peripheral countries in dire straits and Germany in a comparatively advantageous position, the current crisis presents more than one similarity with that terrible historical phase, which created the conditions for the rise of Nazism and World War II.	French: <i>passé composé</i> English: Past tense
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The *passé composé* and the past tense are used in this example.

Comments: In this example, the *passé composé* is used again to translate the past tense. The function that it performs in this story has been explained by Benvenist and Harald Weinrich.

Table 11. 11th example

Toute la mémoire de ces épouvantables années semble néanmoins avoir été perdue, puisque les autorités allemandes et les autres gouvernements européens ne font que répéter les erreurs du passé.	All memory of those dreadful years appears to have been lost, however, as the German authorities and the other European governments are repeating the same mistakes as were made then.	French: N/A English: Past tense
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French: N/A; **English:** past tense

Comments: In this last example, the past tense is translated into French by lexical items: 'the same mistakes as **were made** then: *ne font que répéter les erreurs du passé*'. The technique used in this case is called in French '*la transposition*'. This is an example where the verb form (were made) is replaced by a prepositional syntagm (*du passé*) in the French translation and the idea of past (the same mistakes as were made then) is expressed by the lexical items '*ne font que répéter les erreurs du passé*' and not by a verb as in the English version. There is no aspect of past tense in the syntagm '*ne font que répéter les erreurs du passé*'. This raises another interesting question on whether verbs are the only grammatical items that express the idea of past in European languages. We saw at the beginning of this discussion on tenses that in Chinese there are special time words that are normally used to express the present, the past and the future. This takes us closer to the notion of lexical semantics. In Semantics, John Saeed elaborates on the concept of sentence semantics which comprises tense, aspect and modality. The next item that is going to be discussed is the notion of aspect.

2. Aspect

2.1. What is the function of Aspect in a sentence?

John Saeed gives the following definition:

« Aspect systems allow speakers to relate situations and time, but instead of fixing situations in time relative to the act of speaking, like tense does, aspect allows speakers to view an event in various ways: as complete or incomplete, as so short as to involve almost no time, as something stretched over a perceptible period, or as something repeated over a period.¹²⁹ »

Charles Hockett says that Aspects have to do, not with the location of an event in time, but with its temporal distribution or contour. We can compare the following sentences:

- (1) Ralph was building a fire-escape last week.
- (2) Ralph built a fire-escape last week¹³⁰.

Both sentences describe a situation in the past but they differ. Sentence (2) views the situation as completed, while sentence (1) gives no information about whether the fire-escape ever got finished. 'Was building' is a past progressive tense/aspect form and 'built' is in a simple past tense/aspect form. In English, there are progressive forms (I am listening, I was listening, I will be listening), perfect forms (I have listened, I had listened, I will have listened) and simple forms (I listen, I listened, I will listen). All these forms suggest different aspects of the verb to listen.

The verb forms 'built' and 'was building' refer to the notions of perfect and imperfect. As C.S. Smith (1991) notes, perfectivity includes the viewing of the beginning and end of a situation, while imperfectivity focuses on the middle phase, leaving especially the end unspecified.

Allen (1974: 97) shows in the following sentences how aspect can change the meaning of a sentence:

- (a) I met him when he crossed the street.
These are two consecutive acts: he crossed the street and THEN I met him.
- (b) I met him when he was crossing the street.
The time of 'meeting' is defined as in the middle of the act of crossing.

In another section entitled Aspect of Action, Allen (1974: 75) gives another two examples with different meanings. Compare the sentences:

- He took my photo while I was having dinner.
- I had my dinner while he was taking my photo.

Both sentences contain two clear-cut ideas: I took my dinner; he took my photo. However, the meaning of the first sentence is that my photo was taken in the middle

¹²⁹ John Saeed (2009: 129)

¹³⁰ Hockett (1958: 237)

of the process of dining. Whereas the second sentence suggests either that the photographer is exceptionally slow or that I am a very quick eater.

John Saeed (2009: 135) gives further examples showing how aspect can change sentence meaning. Compare the following sentences:

- a. He read *The Irish Times*
- b. He has read *The Irish Times*
- c. He used to read *The Irish Times*
- d. He was reading *The Irish Times*

The languages of the world have different ways of expressing aspect. Smith (1991) supports this with examples from Russian. Compare the following sentences:

- On napisalpis'mo.
He wrote (Perfect) a letter.
- On napisal pis'mo i ešte pišet ego
He wrote (Perfect) a letter and still writes (Imperfect) it
'he wrote (Perfect) the letter and is still writing (Imperfect) it

Therefore, aspect contributes to the meaning of a sentence just like words, tenses and modals.

2.2. Example of progressive aspect in the Economists' Warning

Let us look at the following sentence and compare its aspect in English to the French aspect:

Language	Sentence	Aspect	Remarks
English	The crisis is revealing a number of contradictions.	Progressive	
French	La crise est révélatrice d'un certain nombre de contradictions.	Simple	The aspect of the verb of the sentence is simple but the English verb reveal is translated into French by means of an adjective.

2.3. Example of inchoative aspect

Language	Sentence	Aspect	Remarks
English	In June 2010, when the first signs of the eurozone crisis became apparent ...	Inchoative	
French	En juin 2010, lorsque les premiers signes de crise de la zone euro sont devenus évidents ...	Perfective	The <i>passé composé</i> is used to express the inchoative aspect in English. This function is normally performed by the <i>passé simple</i> . The change of tense has resulted in a change of aspect.

At this stage, it is important to note that by replacing the *passé simple* by the *passé composé* in a report like this, the French language has not only altered the temporal system of the language but it has also impacted seriously on the aspectual standards. This departure from the aspectual standards of the language is more visible when you translate from a foreign language into French. The *passé simple* is normally used to mark the beginning or the end of actions taking place in the past.

3. Modality

3.1. The philosophical perspective of modality

Perkins indicates in *Modal expressions in English* that there is considerable vitality left in the study of modality, despite the fact that as a philosophical and linguistic concept it has been the object of continual scrutiny and reformulation since at least the time of Aristotle. It originally developed, in fact, as a result of speculations as to the relationship between modal auxiliary verbs such as MAY and other forms such as POSSIBLE, POSSIBLY, and POSSIBILITY. The term 'modal' is nearly always used by linguists to refer to a syntactically defined subset of auxiliary verbs, of which MAY is one, which are regarded as expressing modality.

One of the first people to commit to writing his ideas on what is now generally referred to as modality was Aristotle (cf. in particular *De Interpretatione*, Chs. 12-13). Central to his discussion are the notions of necessity, possibility, and impossibility, together with the relations which may be perceived to exist between them, and these provide the basis of modal logic. To put it quite simply, it would appear that such notions are conceptually grounded in the fact that human beings often think and behave as though things might be, or might have been, other than they actually are, or were. To speak in terms of 'things being otherwise', however is rather vague. If we

are to gain anything from such a conception of modality, it will be necessary to get clear what such 'things' are, what is that they might have been 'otherwise', and what exactly is meant by 'otherwise'.

So far, then, we can say that to conceive of something being 'otherwise' is to conceive of its being true or real in some non-actual world, or true or real in some state of the actual world at a point in time other than the present moment. We must now consider what can be meant by 'something' in such a context, and we may usefully begin by noting a distinction made by Lyons (1977: 442 ff.) between three conceptually different types of entity. Physical objects, i.e. persons, animals, and things which 'under normal conditions ...are relatively constant as to their perceptual properties' and which 'are located, at any point in time, in what is, psychologically at least, a three dimensional space' are referred to by Lyons as 'first order entities'. 'Second-order entities', on the other hand, are 'events, processes, states-of-affairs, etc., which are located in time and which, in English, are said to occur or take place, rather than to exist', and 'third-order entities' are 'such abstract entities as propositions, which are outside space and time' and can be assessed in terms of their truth value.

"The term 'modality' is not normally used to refer to the status of first-order entities. Events or states-of-affairs (i.e. second order entities) and propositions (i.e. third-order entities) are both commonly included in discussions of modality, although logicians tend to restrict their attention to propositions alone.¹³¹"

Rescher (1968: 24) summarises the conceptual domain of modality as follows: (1) Alethic modalities, relating to the notion of truth itself; (2) Epistemic modalities, relating to knowledge and belief; (3) Temporal modalities, relating to time; (4) Boulomaic modalities, relating to desire; (5) Deontic modalities, relating to duties; (6) Evaluative modalities; (7) Causal modalities, and (8) likelihood modalities.

3.2. The linguistic perspective of modality

John Saeed (2009: 138) indicates that another important semantic category which operates at the sentence level is modality. "Modality is a cover term for devices which allow speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in, a proposition"¹³². Let us take the following sentence: '*Niamh has gone to the airport.*' We generally tend to assume that speakers try to tell the truth, as they know it. However, in this particular case, the speaker may be wrong or deliberately telling lies to mislead us.

Let us take the opposite of the assertion: '*Namh hasn't gone to the airport.*' Both sentences seem to carry an unspoken guarantee of 'to the best of my knowledge'. Modal systems allow speakers to modulate this guarantee: to signal stronger and

¹³¹Perkins, Michael R. (1983)

¹³² John Saeed (2009: 138)

weaker commitment to the factuality of statements. A number of linguistic strategies are used to modulate this guarantee. An adjective or adverb of modality can be added to the sentence to perform this function. If S is our sentence, we can say: (a) It is certain that S; (b) it is probable that S; (c) It is likely that S; (d) It is possible that S. Versions (a) to (d) move from strong to weak commitment to S.

Another strategy is to put in the higher clause a verb which describes the extent of the speaker's belief. This is called the propositional attitude: (a) I know that S; (b) I believe that S; (c) I think that S; (d) I don't know that S; (e) I doubt that S; (f) I know that not S. In these examples, we have a gradient from the certainty of the truth of the proposition expressed by S through to the certainty of its falsity.

A third strategy found in English is the use of auxiliary verbs. Example: 'She has left by now'. (a) She must have left by now; (b) She might have left by now; (c) She could have left by now; (d) She needn't have left by now; (e) She couldn't have left by now.

The examples used so far have been of epistemic modality because the speaker is signalling degrees of knowledge. There are also examples of deontic modality which expresses obligation and permission: (a) You must take these books back; (b) You can leave them there. John Saeed comments that 'one suggestion is that modality in general allows us to compare the real world with hypothetical versions of it. This approach derives from work on **possible world semantics** by David Lewis (1973, 1986) and others. Compare 'It might be raining in Belfast' with 'It must be raining in Belfast'. In the first statement, the speaker is setting up a hypothetical situation (rain in Belfast) and predicting a reasonable match with reality, whereas in the second statement, he/she is proposing a very strong match between her prediction and reality. In the story, several modals are used to give an indication of the writer's attitude to the proposition expressed.

3.3. The various modals used in the story and their meanings

In the story, the modals **may**, **will**, **must**, **can**, **could** and **would** are used.

1st example : **May**

1. While this sluggishness of political response **may** appear justified in the less severe phases of the cycle and moments of respite on the financial market, it **could** have the most serious consequences in the long run.

What is the meaning of the modal **May**? Coates (1983: 18) has published an interesting study on the modals in English. The modal *May* is, according to her, an epistemic modal.

"Of the many types of modality recognised by logicians, Epistemic modality is the one which most clearly is relevant to normal language. It is concerned with the speaker's assumptions or assessment of possibilities and, in most cases, it indicates the speaker's confidence (or lack of confidence) in the truth of the proposition expressed. The modals

relating to assumption are MUST, SHOULD and OUGHT; those relating to an assessment of possibilities are MAY, MIGHT, COULD and WILL¹³³.

In a quantitative study carried out on the frequency of the use of modals in two corpora, namely Lancaster Corpus (containing 1,000,000 words extracted from printed materials) and Survey of English Usage (based on oral speeches and unpublished documents), Coates demonstrates that as far as May is concerned, it is used to express the epistemic modality of possibility in 74 percent of cases.

In Chapter 6, which is entitled "The Modals of Epistemic Possibility: May and Might", Coates explains that these modals express the lack of confidence of a speaker in the proposition expressed. *Perhaps, possible that* and *probably* are included in these modals.

To illustrate the idea of uncertainty associated with the use of this modal, Coates (1968: 132) gives the following example:

(i) Epistemic 'Possibility'

I may be a few minutes late # but I don't know #.

May is a notion characterized by subjectivity, the flexibility of the reference time, and the use of a hedge (which enables a speaker to avoid making any commitment to the truthfulness of the proposition expressed).

Regarding the flexibility of the reference time, Coates gives the following example:

A much better solution exists in the scheme drawn up by the London County Council's architects. It may not be perfect, but at least it has some of the qualities /.../ that one looks for in a modern city centre¹³⁴.

According to her, this formulation means '*although possibly it is not perfect, at least it has some of the qualities ...*'

Still in the sixth chapter of the book, which is entitled Epistemic Meaning, Coates says in 6.1.1 that as far as May is concerned, '*it can be paraphrased by 'it is possible that ...'/'perhaps*'.

A further look at the above-mentioned sentence in which this modal appears reveals that indeed the writer shows a weak commitment to the truthfulness of his/her story: '*While this sluggishness of political response **may** appear justified in the less severe phases of the cycle...*'

2ndexample: Would

¹³³Coates (1983 : 18)

¹³⁴Coates (1968: 135)

1. In June 2010, when the first signs of the euro zone crisis became apparent, a letter signed by three hundred economists pointed out the inherent dangers of austerity policies, which **would** further depress the demand for goods and services as well as employment and incomes.
2. Budget cuts **would** restore the markets' confidence in the solvency of the EU countries.
3. The correction of these imbalances **would** require concerted action on the part of all the member countries.

Coates (1968: 26) says that *would* has three meanings: 1) Assumption (it is the most frequent use of this modal); 2) Prediction (secondary use); 3) Volition (secondary use)

In *The Hypothetical Modals: Would and Should*, Coates (1968: 205) presents *Would* as the past tense form and as a hypothetical marker.

"*Would* (that is, *would* and 'd) functions as both the past tense form of *Will* and as a general hypothetical marker. The latter of these two functions is by far the more important, accounting for 83 per cent of examples in the Survey samples (63 per cent in the Lancaster sample)..."

The following examples are given to illustrate the various functions of *Would*:

Past tense form of *will* = *Willingness*

I told Stetson that I *would* not take an appointment there unless I had previously seen the place.

Past tense form of *Will* = *Intention*

All that was part of the past, she *would* put it behind her. She *would* never be jealous again.

Past tense form of *Will* = *Predictability*

They used to have great arguments about some things and they'd both go away holding to their own views and then the second *would* hear the first expounding the second's view as his own.

Past tense form of *Will* = *Prediction*

Mary was waiting to see what *would* happen.

Hypothetical marker = *Volition*

And unless I'd said something really that I wouldn't want recorded for posterity I *would* certainly say yes.

Marker of assumption (epistemic)

You know if we were in a foreign hospital we *wouldn't* be responding in that way".

In the above-mentioned paragraph 'In June 2010, when the first signs of the euro zone crisis became apparent, a letter signed by three hundred economists pointed out the inherent dangers of austerity policies, which **would** further depress the demand for goods and services as well as employment and incomes', **would** expresses prediction as the past tense form of will.

3rd example: Will

1. By the end of 2013 there **will** be 19 million unemployed in the euro zone alone
2. It is essential to realise that if the European authorities continue with policies of austerity and rely on structural reforms alone to restore balance, the fate of the euro **will** be sealed.
3. In the absence of conditions for a reform of the financial system and a monetary and fiscal policy making it possible to develop a plan to revitalise public and private investment, counter the inequalities of income and between areas, and increase employment in the peripheral countries of the Union, the political decision makers **will** be left with nothing other than a crucial choice of alternative ways out of the euro.

In Coates' histogram, *Will* means prediction (this is its most frequent use) and willingness (this is its secondary use). In Chapter 7 entitled *The modals of volition and prediction: Will and shall*, Coates (1968: 169) indicates that the modals Will, Shall, Be going to and Intend belong to the same group. The meanings of Will and Shall vary between the Root meanings of volition and the epistemic meanings of prediction. When their meanings are very weak, the epistemic forms of Will and Shall are merely tense morphemes.

Coates underlines that the meanings associated with *will* are 'willingness', 'intention', 'predictability' and 'prediction', which are all related to the notion of future. In a diagram called *Fuzzy set diagram of will*, Coates (1968: 170) shows that the various meanings of *will* are the following:

Root meaning: Willingness, intention

Epistemic meaning: Predictability

Prediction: In between the first two meanings, there is prediction.

Let us look at the following examples illustrating the meanings of *will*:

'Willingness': I mean I don't think the bibliography should suffer because we can't find a publisher who will do the whole thing.

'Intention': I'll put them in the post today.

'Predictability': Your lordship will know what her age was.

'Prediction': I think the bulk of this year's students will go into industry.

It seems that in the three above-mentioned sentences in which *will* appears, it expresses prediction.

4th example: Must

1. "If we take the view that Germany **must** be kept impoverished and her children starved and crippled [...] If we aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe, vengeance, I dare predict, **will** not limp."

Coates (1968:26) says that "*Must has two main meanings, a Root meaning (Obligation/Necessity) and an Epistemic meaning (logical Necessity/confident Inference)*".

Root:

"You must play this ten times over," Miss Jarova would say, pointing with relentless fingers to a jumble of crotchets and quavers.

Epistemic:

(b) That place must make quite a profit for it was packed out and has been all week.

Coates (1968: 32) demonstrates that 'Root Must' has a set of meanings ranging from strong obligation to weak obligation. It can be interpreted in some cases by '*it is imperative/obligatory/I order you to x*' and in some other cases by '*it is important*'. In spite of this range of meanings, there is a common basic meaning which is '*it is necessary for ...*'. In *Fuzzy Set Diagram of Root Must*, Coates says that when *Must* suggests a strong obligation, it is subjective, whereas when it suggests a weak obligation, it is objective. Coates (1968: 46) notes that "Epistemic modals are essentially subjective, that is, for the most part they focus on the speaker's attitude to the proposition expressed in the main predication".

In 4.1.1.1, she indicates that the interpretation of the modal *must* can become complicated when another characteristic is present or absent: the involvement of the speaker in the statement.

Coates (1968: 33) says that *Root Must* has the following characteristics in the psychology of a speaker whose mother tongue is English:

- (i) Subject is animate.
- (ii) Main verb is activity verb.
- (iii) Speaker is interested in getting subject to perform the action.
- (iv) Speaker has authority over subject.

In the above-mentioned example, "If we take the view that Germany **must** be kept impoverished..., **must** has its root meaning which is obligation or necessity.

4. Conclusion

Just like words, tenses, aspects and modals have meanings which contribute to sentence semantics. This paper has shown that translation is an exercise in which the translator makes choices (of words, tenses, etc.) to account for the meaning of the original text. These choices are most of the time complex because meaning is not isomorphic across languages. This is particularly so because there is no perfect fit between words, tenses, aspects and modals in two languages.

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