

Reported evidentials in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian: a pilot study of translated fiction

A number of Baltic (Latvian, Lithuanian) and Finnic (Estonian, Livonian) languages in the eastern part of the Circum-Baltic area use a reported evidential (RE) construction that developed on the basis of participial forms (Aikhenvald 2018; Friedman 2018; Holvoet 2007; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001). Consider the forms of RE marked in bold in (1):

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| (1) | Estonian | <i>Ta rääkivat saksa keelt</i> |
| | Livonian | <i>Ta rõkāndiji saksā kieldõ</i> |
| | Latvian | <i>Viņš runājot vāciski</i> |
| | Lithuanian | <i>Jis kalbąs vokiškai</i> |
| | | ‘He, reportedly, speaks German’ |

We believe that the use of parallel corpora is one of the ways to advance the studies of evidential constructions in Baltic and Finnic. In our talk, we will discuss the frequency of use of RE construction in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian on the basis of a pilot study using a small parallel corpus of translated fiction. The corpus consists of one Lithuanian and two Latvian novels, alongside their direct translations into Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian: Alvydas Šlepikas, *Mano vardas – Marytė* (2011; translated into Latvian and Estonian), Jānis Jonevs, *Jelgava 94* (2013; translated into Lithuanian and Estonian), and Nora Ikstena, *Mātes piens* (2015; translated into Lithuanian and Estonian). We admit that a clear shortcoming of our corpus is that it does not include original Estonian fiction.

In the original Latvian texts (*Jelgava 94* and *Mātes piens*), 143 instances of the RE construction were found. In the Estonian translations of the novels, RE correspondences appeared in only 45 cases (31.5%), while in the Lithuanian translations, the use of RE was twice as low, with only 22 instances (15.4%). Despite low frequency of use of RE in Lithuanian, it is worth noting that we identified 5 constructions which were used independently from the Latvian original, i.e., the RE construction appeared only in the Lithuanian text. In the Lithuanian novel (*Mano vardas – Marytė*) no RE constructions were found. None appeared in the translation of this novel into Estonian, while in the Latvian translation, RE was used 33 times and this demonstrates the productivity of the construction in Latvian.

As our corpus expands in the future, we expect to identify more RE constructions in Lithuanian. For example, Daugavet (2023) reports that in a parallel Lithuanian-Latvian corpus *LiLa* (<https://sitti.vdu.lt/en/lila-parallel-corpus/>), perfect and evidential (mostly RE) constructions in Lithuanian are of similar frequency: in total, 160 perfect and 157 evidential constructions were found. In line with our findings, Daugavet (2023) observes that evidentials in Latvian are notably more frequent than in Lithuanian: the Latvian part of the corpus contains 615 perfect and 461 evidential constructions.

We also noted that when RE construction was absent in the translations, it was sometimes replaced by lexical markers, such as Lithuanian *esq* ‘reportedly’, Estonian *väidetavalt* ‘allegedly’, the verbs of speech (Lithuanian *pasakyti* ‘say, tell’, Estonian *ütlema* ‘idem’), or specialized phrases like Estonian *tema sõnul* ‘in her/his words’, among others.

We admit that our data are too limited to draw any definitive conclusions and we are looking forward to compiling a larger corpus that could confirm (or refute) our initial observation that RE in Latvian is more frequent than in Estonian, and least frequent in Lithuanian. It should be also noted that the frequency of use of RE may, to some extent, depend on the preferences of individual authors and translators.

References

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