

Rules of Reporting:
The Principles of Representing
Spoken Discourse in the Records
Office of the Finnish Parliament

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A blast from the past...

”[In the new editing test in 1897] the stenographer had to demonstrate his ability to **correct a contentually and technically bad speech into exemplary condition regarding both matter and linguistic form**. Even though the stenographer was not supposed to turn a bad speaker into an eloquent one, it was considered that his duty was to **compose confusing statements into such shape that it was easy to get a hold of their content.**”

(Kaarlo Kallioniemi 1946: *Pikakirjoitus ja säätyvaltiopäivät*. [Stenography and the parliament.] WSOY, p. 147.)

Background for the discussion

- Beginning of audio recordings
 - Arrival of online video broadcasts
 - Changing parliamentary speech culture and language attitudes
 - New knowledge on linguistic variation and interaction
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- Accepting more linguistic variation
 - More attention to reporting principles
 - Need for explicit guidelines
 - Call for open documentation for the public

Speech vs. writing: a theoretical approach

Speech

- Sound
- Dynamic action
- Shared context and immediate interaction
- Product inseparable of production
- Fast process and real time planning
- Fading; unique reception
- Intonation, gestures, expressions etc.

→ Away from the 'written language bias'

Writing

- Image
- Static artefact
- Separate contexts and delayed interaction
- Product separated from production
- Slow process and planning in advance
- Permanent; repeatable
- Ortography, layout etc.

(Further reading: Biber 1988; Halliday 1989; Chafe 1994; Linell 2005.)

Linguistic principles in the Finnish Records Office

- Acknowledging the effects of reporting
- Source of open information as a key aim
- Public and media as the key audiences
- Wide definition of grammatical correctness
- Balancing between:
 - 1) speech and writing
 - 2) authenticity and readability
 - 3) written standard and linguistic variation

Grammar

- 1) **Speech sounds:** standardization
 - 2) **Words:** very few changes
 - 3) **Phrases:** moderate toleration of variation
 - 4) **Sentences:** high toleration of variation
- *This is a remarkable thing this government proposal*
 - *This government proposal is a remarkable thing.*

Self-corrections and planning expressions

- **Self-corrections:** abiding by speakers final choices
 - *And this is... These things must not be mixed up*
 - *These things must not be mixed up*
- **Planning expressions:** erasing clear cases from sight
 - *It was ... kind of... like... peculiar'*
 - *It was peculiar*

Blunders and slips of tongue

- Correction in obvious cases
 - *Indifference towards the law diminishes, unfortunately*
 - *Indifference towards the law increases, unfortunately*
- Sometimes hard to distinguish blunders from ignorance!

Erroneous claims, false citations, inappropriate conduct

- No changes! (blurred boundaries)
 - 1) *In this poem by Eino Leino...* [wrong poet]
 - 2) *In the words of former president Paasikivi:*
"The acknowledgement of facts is the beginning of all wisdom." [inaccurate citation]
 - 3) *You are lying!* [forbidden accusation]

Non-verbal actions and events

- **Prosody:** changes in the word order
 - *There has been only conversation in that regard*
 - *There has been conversation only in that regard*
- **Gestures, movements and events:** additions when necessary for understanding the speech
 - *Here it is. [MP waved the budget proposal in his hand.]*

“Unnecessary” words?

- Planning expressions: *like, kind of...*
- Sentence-initial particles: *and, but, well, so...*
- Mannerisms: *really, then, it must be said that...*

Possible directions for further development

- 1) Bringing the written record closer to the video recording
→ moving towards authenticity
- 2) Distancing the written record from the video recording by standardization
→ moving towards readability or aesthetic norms
- 3) Moving to written summaries of the discussion (approved by the MP' s)
→ emphasizing content over form
- 4) Replacing written reports with video links
→ saving money, but...

Other alternative directions?

Literature

- Biber, D. 1988: *Variation accross speech and writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1989: *Spoken and written language*. Oxford University Press.
- Chafe, W. 1994: *Discourse, consciousness, and time. The flow and displacement of conscious experience in speaking and writing*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Linell, P. 2005: *The written language bias in linguistics. Its nature, origins, and transformations*. Routledge.