

TERMINOLOGY TO SUIT YOUR POCKET

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1. WORDS WORTH SELLING

Some truisms: The French language, amongst others, contains a number of scientific and technical terms, estimated at approximately half a million. One of the problems with technolects is that they are constituted not only of a specialised terminology (terms relating to concepts and objects of analysis of various theories) but also of scientific discourse, made up of compulsory terms from the lexicon of the field, which are the terms used by specialists in order to express relations between concepts or sentences, notions or relations by which the theory in question can be illustrated (the phraseology of the field).

An additional difficulty inherent in jargons is that their vocabulary can be specific to the field or used by other sciences as well (economists, for instance, also use of mathematical discourse), or borrowed from everyday language in order to express, in a particular context, a relation which is useful for analytical purposes.

For these reasons, terminological research takes up to 60% of the time needed for translation, and it takes a great deal of time for students in scientific and technical disciplines to master their terminology. Any help in this field is thus appreciated, and pays for itself.

2. TERMINOLOGY VERSUS DICTIONARIES

For many terminologists, terminology is a new discipline; notions to which denominations correspond are, according to them, the mental representation associated with our perception of an object in the real world, whereas the concept is the mental but strictly linguistic, representation, of it (Saussure's signifie). Terminology is the science of terms as lexicology is that of words. But as Dubois pointed out(1), linguists have shown that we cannot have any mental representation of the world but a linguistic one, direct knowledge of the world is excluded. Even if terminology does not exist as a science yet, as A. Rey admitted(2), terminography is a practice that has proved itself and produces valuable products, thanks to its methodology.

2.1 In terminography, the different fields are conceived as semantic fields, or terminological isotopias(3), which are "wholes of interrelated notions" (4). Generic, specific, antonymic and synonymic relations between terms can thus be searched for, and hence, definitions be more precise. Another consequence of that componential analysis is that terminography is a systematic, hence exhaustive, job. The study of the bibliographic corpus, and the analysis of the terminological files constituted that way, are carried out following the notional tree as defined by Wüster. The structure of the field can and usually will, differ, be it only slightly, from one language to another; the terminographer proceeds therefore separately for the different languages concerned, and the fusion of the files only intervenes as a second stage, thereby avoiding a danger from which dictionaries cannot always escape, that of hypertrophy of the input language to the prejudice of the target one, and showing more clearly "partial overlappings between notions, or possible gaps between one of the languages, all signs of the difference in the cutting of reality between the languages concerned"(4).

2.2 The work unit, in terminography, is the term (notion + denominations) whereas lexicography works with words (signified + signifying). But a term can range from a word to a whole sentence; whereas some dictionaries, even technical ones, stick to the word, in terminographic works its boundaries are broken, which therefore more closely reflect the technolects in situ.

2.3 Terminographic products however do have some concrete qualities. These semi-finished products are quite explicit and transparent : definitions and contexts, references of quoted sources, syntactical, semantical and bibliographical notes, give additional information on the dynamics of the term.

2.4 Another practical advantage of the "fiches" system, or computing storage, is the possibility of quicker updating of the vocabularies, an essential feature to keep up with evolution of the jargons : according to a study of the Carnegie-Mellon University, for instance, dictionaries on electronics, are as a rule, published six years too late (5).

3. FOR WHICH CUSTOMERS?

Terminological problems are particularly acute for free-lance translators. They do not indeed benefit from documentary infrastructure such as glossaries for internal use, nor from the sources of information, from which business translators and translators working in the public sector can profit.

Nor do free-lancers have the technical or financial possibility of consulting existing terminological data banks, since the purchase or hire cost of the modem necessary for the consultation, and the cost of the network, are at present far too high for their budget, and retrieval rate too low. Free-lancers will thus for some time to come have to go on constructing their own documentation. We might be able to help them to support their personal, alphabetical and/or systematic, file, by providing them with terminologies on hard copy, and to do pin-point research for them. Other "targets" for terminological "products" are

technicians and scientists. Abbou(6) suggested that voluntary lexical creation by professional lexicographers and institutes of standardisation must indeed be replaced by genuine lexical creativity of the users themselves: they are the ones possessing the creative keys (phonological, semantical, matrices, playfulness) of neologisms. The only thing they lack are the laws of neological formation. The Centre de Terminologie de Bruxelles tries to help them to obtain some of those, by using the Latin-Greek roots to coin terms, and to give advice when asked (for instance, is traductology preferable to metaphrastics? Or cancerigenic should be used instead of cancerogenic). Scientists also need equivalents in their mother language, for the terms they mostly find in a foreign language in specialised literature.

4. TERMINOLOGY FOR SALE!

4.1 Systematic research

4.1.1 Cards

The Brussels Centre publishes fiches on A4 cards which are definitional, contextual and include notes. The nomenclatures are systematic. Languages are French plus another: English, Dutch, German or Italian, and sometimes Russian. These Cahiers de terminologie include 1,000 fiches a year, on various fields. Up to now 12,000 fiches have been published.

4.1.2 List of Latin-Greek constituents of international scientific and technical vocabulary

Twelve booklets of Latin-Greek roots used in international scientific and technical terminology have been published so far in addition to Le language et l'homme, the linguistic review of the Marie Haps Institute for Translators and Interpreters, of which the Centre forms a part. Comments on the use of these roots are included to avoid frequent mistakes.

4.1.3 Bulletin of bibliographic references

In addition to the vocabularies, every three months the Centre issues, also on fiches, the Bulletin des references bibliographiques, which is an abstract of multilingual technical and scientific dictionaries and of theoretical books on terminology.

4.2 Pin-point research

Several terminology Centres have set up a kind of "help service" to help the translators when they are stuck in their search for an equivalent term. We provide the same service, by phone or by mail, to free-lance translators or any other translator.

5. COSTS AND PRICES

The cost of the terminological fiches is not very high; in addition to that of the terminographic research as such, it includes the price of the cards, typing, printing and mailing. In the Brussels Centre, they

are produced in a very old fashioned and inexpensive way: we first type them on an IBM golf ball typewriter, and then photocopy them in reduction (they are reduced by half) on a card with a Xerox 3000. The cards are then cut by a specialised firm and the Cahiers are finally sent to the subscribers. It is a cheap system, considering the number of subscribers we have.

These costs we hope will be reduced in the near future, thanks to word processing. It will be too expensive to have the fiches multicopied on the daisy-wheel, impact or any other text processing printer, because of the price of the ribbons, but the functions of revision, formatting etc. will increase the productivity of the typist (average percentage of time saving is said to be 30 or 40%) and additional functions of the word processing software will accelerate the secretarial work related to publications (mailing, invoicing, correspondence). Encoding the data will automatically entail their storage, which will mean the starting of a terminological data base, and reduce the cost of the labour necessary to classify the fiches on hard copy in bulky files, etc. The vocabularies are sold for cost price or exchanged.

Pin-point consultations are free of charge; the costs involved are telephone calls, documentation maintenance and research. Again, the possibilities of a communicating word processor will enable us to consult other terminological banks, and so facilitate our research.

6. CONCLUSION

The fields that are most frequently requested are high technology (data processing, medicine, engineering, etc.) and law. Where pin-point research is concerned, questions usually concern fields for which there is less demand, hence fewer dictionaries (toys, prison jargon, etc.). Sometimes in these cases we give bibliographies of dictionaries instead of giving equivalents.

There is still much to be done: we have terminologies we have not published due to labour shortage, our documentation should be more complete to facilitate research of equivalents in all fields. We would also like to be able to respond more rapidly to the orders we receive for terminographies.

Terminography is a new market the trends of which are difficult to foresee. One thing seems to me important: (sub-)fields must be as specialised and restricted as possible, in order that the terminologies be complete and quickly updated; otherwise they are less useful for translators than dictionaries. They must also be cheap.

Word processing, photocopying or photocomposition are easy, low cost and rapid methods of publishing nomenclatures without an intermediary, and enable small research and terminological centres, or groups of translators, to pool their terminological resource to make the most of them and make them available to others.

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