

Terminology in the European Communities

P.J. Arthern

Council of the European Communities

BACKGROUND

When the European Coal and Steel Community was established in 1952, a small spring in Luxembourg began to bubble forth the terms needed to structure and operate the infant Community in four languages — French, German, Dutch and Italian. This event hardly stirred the consciousness of terminologists in Continental Europe, certainly not in the United Kingdom, but where there is translation there is always some terminological activity — in the sense of a deliberate effort to record terms for future use, in case they slip the translators' memory.

However, it was not until the two other European Communities burst upon the scene in 1957 — the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community, still with the same six Member States as in the Coal and Steel Community, and the same four languages — that the operation and gradually increasing influence of the European Communities began to affect the use and the development of European languages.

Engaging now in a little terminology work, I should point out that there is technically no such thing as 'the European Community'. There are still the three separate European Communities, certainly with joint institutions, but the areas to which they relate have to be administered pursuant to the three separate original treaties, except insofar as this situation has been amended by the Single European Act signed last year but not yet ratified by all the Member States.

In practice, however, the Communities do look like one Community from outside, usually referred to as the European Economic Community, or the Common Market or the European Community. There are now 12 Member States — France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxem-

bourg — the original six, who have been joined by the United Kingdom, Denmark and the Irish Republic in 1973, Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. Allowing for some duplication of languages used the Communities now have nine ‘official and working languages’ — English, French, Danish, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish, and also employ Irish (Irish Gaelic) as an official language in some treaty texts, but not as a working language.

The very first Regulation adopted by the European Economic Community and Euratom, the Atomic Energy Community, laid down the languages to be employed by the Communities and how they were to be employed, and has been amended on every subsequent accession of new Member States so that it is still the legal basis for all language use in the Communities.

Very soon after the two new Communities started operating in 1958, if not before, terminology bureaux were set up in at least some of the Community institutions, in order to provide the increasing number of translators and interpreters with some of the tools of their trade, in the form of glossaries listing the newly developing terminology in the various fields into which the Communities were beginning to move.

It would be a fascinating exercise to trace the history of terminological work in the various institutions from the beginning to the present day, but there is no time for that now. I will only say that at one stage, before anyone had connected a visual display unit to a computer, and when computers were great beasts which lived in cavernous lairs, devouring programmers and specially conditioned air, the Commission’s terminology bureau created a computerised terminology bank called Euroterm which produced lists of terms, based if I remember correctly on a keyword system, in printed volumes larger than thick telephone directories. Translators found great difficulty in using them and consequently Euroterm disappeared from the scene.

EURODICAUTOM

And then, in 1974, the current terminology databank, Eurodicautom, saw the light, fed largely at the beginning with terms in French and English borrowed from the now defunct computerised terminology system at the University of Montreal. Over the years Eurodicautom has been greatly improved in its approach and its performance, and now contains hundreds of thousands of terms in the nine Community languages and in all areas of the Communities’ activities. Eurodicautom terminals are now in general use throughout the Community institutions and it is possible for any translator or translation organisation in the European Communities to be connected.

THE SEVEN COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

The three European Communities are now operated by seven institutions: the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice are the largest and most important while there are three smaller bodies, the Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank and the Court of Auditors. There are thousands of translators and interpreters working for the Communities, as each institution has its translation service, the size of which depends on the activities it is called upon to support, and there are two joint interpreting Directorates, one in Brussels and one in Luxembourg, which serve all the meetings held in all the institutions in the respective cities.

While there is a certain amount of terminological activity in all seven institutions, the smaller ones have never found it possible to allocate staff exclusively to recording and organising the terms they use; it would appear that translators are left to collect their own terms as best they can.

THE COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

It is the Commission and the European Parliament which have the longest history in organised terminology work, dating from 1958, if not before. Consequently, it is they, and in particular the Commission, which have had the greatest impact on language consciousness and terminology, both within the Communities and in the wider world outside, i.e. government, law, industry and commerce, agriculture and the general public.

Following a reorganisation in the dim and distant past the Commission found itself with most of its staff in Brussels, while some Directorates General remained in Luxembourg, where the Coal and Steel Community had been established. At first the translating staff in Luxembourg were to produce 'long-term' translations, whatever that was supposed to mean, while the Brussels people were to do 'short-term' translations.

In practice, people in both Luxembourg and Brussels wanted both short-term and long-term translations so, after a period in which long-term and short-term translations were crossing in the post as they winged their way from one part of the Commission to the other (there were no fax, telecopier or telefax machines then), the Commission ended up with *two* translation services and *two* terminology bureaux.

These terminology bureaux operated in relative independence for many years, the Luxembourg one being responsible for running and developing Eurodicautom while the Brussels bureau produced specialised multilingual glossaries. Very recently there has been a determined attempt to re-unite the Brussels and Luxembourg branches of the Commission's translation service and therefore the two terminology services as well, with a stronger co-ordinating organisation in Brussels. It remains to be seen how

this will affect the recording and distribution of terminology within the Commission in the long run.

In any case, both in the Commission and in the European Parliament the terminology bureaux have always operated largely by producing and circulating specialised multi-lingual glossaries. They were and still are centralised and somewhat remote from the translators in the various language Sections and Divisions, although they certainly offer an answering service by telephone to translators who need help with their current translation.

THE COUNCIL

For many years the Council was inexplicably without any organised terminology service at all. Everything was left to the individual translators who collected their own record of terms as they saw fit — or did not! That this situation did not lead to disaster is probably due to the fact that the Council has to work on legislative texts proposed by the Commission and transmitted in all the Community languages (and there were only the original four at that stage) so that the Commission had researched the terminology in the texts which the Council translators were using as their reference documents. Also somewhere approaching half the pages translated in the Council Secretariat are based in whole or in part on texts previously existing in all the languages.

After the United Kingdom, Denmark and the Irish Republic joined the Communities on 1 January 1973 there was a certain amount of individual initiative in one or two of the Language Divisions in the Council Secretariat — now six of them with the addition of English and Danish to the original four languages. This led to the formation of a volunteer terminology group consisting of one linguist from each division, which worked to encourage terminological activity and finally proposed a detailed scheme for a Council terminology service. The Director responsible for the translation department at that time accepted this scheme in every detail and the Council's Secretary General appointed the Deputy Head of the Translation Department to run the new terminology bureau and launched it on its way in April 1979.

Having been planned by translators for translators, the new terminology bureau was — and has remained — radically different from the older ones in the Commission and the European Parliament. Instead of being centralised and remote from day-to-day translation work, it consists of a terminology office incorporated into the structure of each Division, working solely for the linguists in that Division, with one terminologist/documentalist as an overall co-ordinator, running a central secretariat staffed by a number of multi-lingual secretaries who, between them, can type in all Community languages — now 10, including Irish.

In each individual Division there is one permanent full-time terminologist who is on the terminology bureau's strength, assisted by some half-dozen linguists who work as terminologists on a part-time volunteer basis, while remaining on the staff of the Translation Directorate. This means in principle that in each Division there are always two people on duty in the terminology office. Their prime responsibility is to assist translators by finding the answers to any terminology problems they may have, while the translators continue to work on the remainder of their text, and to make a careful record of the answer on a file card. Translators and revisers are also now encouraged to record on these cards any terms they may have been able to discover for themselves, with an indication of the document in which the term was encountered and of the source of the translation which they employed.

All these cards are vetted by the terminologists and, in the English Division at least, are displayed in batches on a special notice board so that everyone in the Division can see them as they go about their business. People thus become aware that these new terms exist, even if they do not learn them; they are also encouraged to add comments or suggestions to the cards if they have anything relevant to contribute.

After checking by whatever means is employed in each particular division the successive batches of cards are placed in boxes waiting to be incorporated in bilingual glossaries for that division. The first glossary to be produced in this way was the original edition of the French-English *European Communities Glossary*, now in its eighth edition and on sale to the general public. Subsequent versions of the *European Communities Glossary* were the English-French and French-German volumes. Since most Council documents have been drafted in French in the past, and the proportion of documents being drafted in English is increasing — particularly so during the United Kingdom Presidency — we expect that further glossaries will in due course be produced and published in separate volumes from French into Dutch, Italian, Danish, Greek, Spanish and Portuguese, and from English into these languages, as well as into German.

A further development in the Council's terminology service is that it is now setting up a computerised terminology database for its own use, independent of Eurodicautom. It has been designed by translators for translators and a working group of volunteer translator-terminologists is now working very hard on curing the teething troubles, in co-operation with the manufacturer of the hardware.

The hardware in this system consists of an ICL mainframe computer (2900 series) and Olivetti ETS 2010 word processors used as terminals. The software is a STATUS database management system with interface programs specially written for the Council.

It may be thought that the existence of several terminology bureaux down the years, and now the development of two separate terminology

databanks, is a wasteful duplication. There have indeed been proposals for setting up a Community-wide terminology bureau, but the originators of such proposals forget that all the seven Community institutions have their own character and their own operating characteristics and hence their differing terminology requirements. Perhaps the only common characteristic is that the translators want their terminology fast, and the only way to get it fast, and to get new terminology records fed into the system fast, is to have the terminology bureau close at hand.

As already mentioned, the terminologists cannot get closer to the translators than in the Council Secretariat, where each language division's terminology bureau is right in the division and where it is intended to feed each day's crop of terms into the new computerised system the same day.

THE GIIT

What has been a generally successful attempt down the years to co-ordinate the areas in which the various terminology bureaux have been working is the Communities' Groupe interinstitutionnel de la Terminologie (GIIT), which meets three times a year, alternating in Luxembourg and in Brussels, and celebrated its fiftieth meeting very recently. It contains representatives of all seven Community institutions, of the Brussels Interpreters Directorate and of the European Patent Office, the Berlin European Foundation for Vocational Training and the Dublin European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

THE CONFERENCE OF TRANSLATION SERVICES OF WEST EUROPEAN STATES

Besides making it possible to avoid at least the grossest forms of duplication, the GIIT has also undertaken a number of relevant initiatives such as co-operation with CIUTI, the University Translating Courses body, and during the last six years has represented the Community institutions in the new 'Conference of Translation Services of West European States' set up in Berne, Switzerland, in October 1982, with 26 member services from 12 West European countries.

It has become the declared policy of this Conference to encourage its members to co-operate with existing terminology databanks rather than to develop new ones of their own. For example, the translation service in the Netherlands Foreign Office is seeking to co-operate with the Commission's Eurodicautom, as is the translation service of the Swiss Federal Chancery.

Another initiative being undertaken by member services of this conference is a terminology databank in preparation for the joint use of all Belgian government translation services (not all of them are members of the

Conference). There is also a term bank being set up for the use of all the Swiss federal government departments — not only the translation services, but for all officials, some of whom are now following training courses as terminologists.

Yet another initiative is that the German Federal Post Office has been working since last April on a term bank associated with word processing equipment being used in a machine-assisted translation project. Contacts have been taken up with a view to extending co-operation on this term bank to the European Communities, the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva and the Swiss Post Office in Berne.

ACCESS TO EUROPEAN COMMUNITY TERMINOLOGY

To round off this brief sketch of terminology in the European Communities, I want to look at some practical questions. How does a translator working in the Community institutions have access to Community terminology, and how can translators outside the Community structure get hold of it?

The translator in the Community institutions has four ways of obtaining terms developed and used in the institutions:

- via a Eurodicautom terminal, probably still in a terminology bureau rather than among translators in their offices;
- from glossaries produced by the various terminology bureaux and distributed to the translation services in all the institutions;
- from earlier Community documents;
- by telephoning the terminology bureau in his or her institution (in the Council, in his or her own division) or going there in person if it is near enough.

As I mentioned earlier, translators outside the Community institutions can link up to Eurodicautom: this system is easy to use and is improving all the time. If you would like to know how this can be done, write to Mr Goetschalckx at the Commission's Terminology Bureau, Kirchberg Centre, Luxembourg.

It is also possible to obtain some Community glossaries by applying to the institutions which produce them, from the Communities' Publications Office in Luxembourg, or from a very few sales points in the Member States' capitals. The Council's glossaries, for example, can in principle be obtained from the European Bookshop at the London Business School, Sussex Place, London NW1 4SA (Tel. 01-723 3902) or from Her Majesty's Stationery Office Bookshop, 49 High Holborn, London WC1N 6HB (Tel. 01-211 5656).

There is a publication containing a complete list of Community glossaries available, together with details of the structure of the various termino-

logy bureaux. It is called the *Répertoire des publications et travaux terminologiques* and can be obtained from Mr R. Goffin, Permanent Secretary of the GIIT, Commission of the European Communities, Terminology and Data Processing Dept., 1 avenue de Cortenberg, 1048 Brussels (Tel. (02) 235.26.42)

AUTHOR

Peter Arthern, Head of English Division, Translation Directorate, Council of the European Communities, Brussels, Belgium.