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Terminology standardization strategies towards the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area

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Abstract

The implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the measures taken places special emphasis on the role of key documents within this process such as degree descriptions and course catalogues. However, previous studies on course catalogues from several European universities have revealed numerous weaknesses in the users' input of information and terminology inconsistencies which confirm the need to develop and implement terminology standardization strategies. This paper proposes criteria and approaches to serve as the basis for establishing a procedure to harmonize and control the terminology used during the drafting and translation of EHEA key documents.

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Introduction

According to the Council of Europe, “The developments within the Bologna Process should serve to facilitate ‘translation’ of one system to the other and therefore contribute to the increase of mobility of students and academics and to the increase of employability throughout Europe” (“The Bologna Process”, 2011). To this end, the European Commission has provided guidance, answers to frequently asked questions and examples of best practices in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Users’ Guide. The implementation of this new university context means that key documents such as the ECTS course catalogue have to be translated and disseminated throughout European Higher Education institutions in order to facilitate mobility.

Due to the large amount of material to translate, and the need for the optimisation of the process in order to deal with time and financial constraints without compromising on quality, the proposal described here involves the translation and standardization of course catalogues using language technology, such as computer assisted translation systems, terminology databases and specialized corpora .

Electronic corpora allow the translator to make use of computer tools and process information by following clearly defined parameters: this enables translators to check the use of certain terms or phrases against other linguistic units in the text, promoting homogeneity and thus improving quality (Laviosa, 2002). In this way,

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translators can create their own databases based on real texts and adapt them to computer-assisted translation tools such as translation memories and terminology management applications.

This paper proposes a detailed analysis of the structure and language features of ECTS course catalogues, with special emphasis on their terminology and phraseology in order to produce a corpus of course catalogues and reference material regarding the European Higher Education Area. This corpus will allow the extraction of terminology and phraseology for use in the construction of databases which will facilitate the drafting and subsequent translation of course catalogues within an integrated software interface, simplifying and automating their writing, translation and dissemination throughout the university's global knowledge base.

1. Translation-Oriented Terminology Management

The main difficulty identified by translators in their work is the inadequacy of available reference material, in terms of its currency, degree of domain specialisation and range of linguistic detail. The most natural tool to use is an original technical text in the target language, which is from the same subject field and, if possible, of the same text type. In addition to such parallel texts, we can also make use of basic monolingual dictionaries, lexicons, etc. Text documentation is crucial because the anticipated finished product coming out of the translation process consists of language in context. Multilingual dictionaries provide only isolated orientation and control functions, not vocabulary in context.

The compilation of a terminological database can compensate translators for this exhaustive and time-consuming task. Therefore, the main reasons for technical translators to compile a terminological database can be summarised as follows:

- Technical dictionaries generally fail to provide adequate phraseological components. However, technical collocations, fixed expressions and standard formulations play an especially significant role in technical texts, and frequently cause translation problems.
- Translators usually work in specific subdomains of subject fields and yet tailor-made glossaries are not available on the market.
- Large jobs are usually divided among several translators; however, the terminology used by the translator team must be consistent throughout the whole project.
- Higher education environments are constantly changing and current and up-to-date terminology is needed.
- The terminological entries can contain different types of information.
- Computerised terminology requires database management systems.

Recent advances in information technology has led to the creation of aids and tools which can provide support to the translator throughout the translation process, in the form of assistance in terminology elicitation, term bank development, terminology retrieval, multilingual text processing, machine-produced rough translations, the identification of previous translations, and spell-checking. However, many translators have held back from becoming involved in practical terminology work because they are uncertain about which computer solution would be ideal in the long run. Translators should configure their approach for their own environments, keeping in mind the expanding possibilities of information exchange with other translators, institutions or future projects and updates.

Thus, based on the literature regarding terminology management and extraction, the overall process and guidelines for compiling terminology applied to translation encompass the following steps:

1. Checking existing resources.
2. Collecting textual material for documentation purposes.
3. Analysing documents. Identifying definitions, synonyms and terms in documents.
4. Structuring the specific domain (concept systems).
5. Compiling terminology records (concept-related data, term related data, other types of information).
6. Intralingua comparison: homonymy, synonymy.
7. Interlingua comparison.
8. Revision.

Sager (1990) adds to this list the need to distinguish between original and translated texts, and the use of running text to ensure coherence and dating of terms, especially in fields where technology is subject to constant change.

2. Methodology

The need to gradually translate course catalogues, together with the time and financial constraints envisaged for this type of project, leads to the need to make use of all available resources, in order to make the translation feasible within the deadlines proposed, for it to be carried out in a standardised way and for it to be compliant with the aim: to create a common information model for describing course information throughout Europe (European Commission, 2009).

After a preliminary review of the literature, machine translation technology was identified as a potential field of study which could throw some light on the issue at hand (Dillinger and Lommel, 2004). However, despite the recent research into machine translation and the successful examples of institutional use of machine translation, the type of translation involved in this case requires such a large amount of specialised vocabulary and field-specific terminology that the design of a machine translation environment was not taken into consideration. However, to achieve the desired consistency, homogeneity and quality for this type of document, computer assisted translation needs to be implemented in a project with these characteristics (Candel-Mora, 2012).

This has led us to propose and devise a hybrid method that makes use of machine translation and computer assisted translation memories, connected to large terminology and textual databases. In other words, the method proposed involves further developing the concept of the translator's workstation (Hutchins 1998; Melby 1992): a set of applications that provide reference material as well as an editing interface for technical writers and translators. In our case, a better denomination would be a translation-oriented workstation, since as well as translators, other users may benefit from some of the functions of the interface.

The need for translation is a recurring characteristic of course catalogues and, for this reason we decided that an in-depth analysis of the process of their design was of interest, in order to identify the consequences of integrating the process of translation with the process of creation and, as suggested by other authors (Spalink 2000:158; Esselink 2000:3), to make the writer aware of the fact that the text is to be translated and that the message has to be to simplified.

Most of the literature on translation studies, while comprehensive in the approach to the process of translation, lacks a global vision of the overall translation task: terminology processing and sources of documentation and information are an important part of the final translated text, but the three-phase division (pre-translation edit, translation phase and post-translation edit) usually adopted in translation theory and in the teaching of translation excludes these documentation and terminology processes.

Since translation is an activity that must be organised according to financial criteria, there exists a constant tension between the demand for quality and the demand for quantity, both of which are accompanied by omnipresent time constraints.

In the approach described here, terminology work is seen as the preliminary step in the translation process. One of the foremost criteria for translation quality must be intelligibility, based on an unambiguous, uniform use of the appropriate specialised language.

Translators are not usually subject specialists, and they are not expected to become experts in every field they translate. Therefore, documentation is used by translators for multiple purposes: to immerse themselves in the topic to be translated, to find the exact equivalents within a given context, and to see how the topic is expressed in a particular type of text, all of which corresponds to the first stage of the translation process. The information and communication capabilities of the Internet and especially open up new possibilities for gathering terminological information and coordinating terminological and translation activities.

3. Analysis and discussion of strategies

A preliminary analysis of the structure of course catalogues revealed several weaknesses in the users' input of information in the different sections (Candel-Mora, 2012), which confirmed the need to develop and implement several phases in order to facilitate the drafting and translation of course catalogues.

3.1. Phase 1: Analysis of the course description structure and sections and identification of target audience

The ECTS Users' Guide includes the standard forms for student applications, learning agreements, training agreements, transcripts of records and the outline of the diploma supplement. However, it only provides a checklist of the recommended contents of the course catalogue and states that the exact format of the catalogue is to be decided by the institution.

According to the ECTS Users' Guide, the course catalogue must contain all the items in the "Checklist for the Course Catalogue". The checklist is divided into three parts:

Part One: Information on the Institution

Part Two: Information on degree programmes

A) General description

B) Description of individual course units

Part Three: General information for students

3.2. Phase 2: Corpus Design

The corpus design phase is structured in terms of 3 sub-stages, in order to extract the targeted terminology, vocabulary and phraseology from the type of texts included in the corpus: course catalogues and prospectuses and specific course descriptions.

The first stage in the development of this corpus consists of identifying the topic or discipline of the text to be translated in order to determine the working field. At this stage, the translator makes contact for the first time with the linguistic and extra-linguistic features of the text to translate, such as style, target audience, terminology or text format, among others.

Parallel texts are useful in that they provide examples of how features of the original text are transferred into the target text as a result of the translation process (Vintar, 2001). In addition, they define the scope of the search for suitable texts and provide the translator with a valuable reference database for further management of terminological data. Therefore, the higher the specificity of the source text, the more necessary it will be for the translator to be able to draw on a reference corpus with which to verify language usage by experts on the topic.

The use of electronic versions of these parallel texts facilitates their efficient exploitation, enabling the performance of a detailed analysis of textual features and typology to take place. Although not specifically with translation in mind, Zampolli (1991:186) suggested the elaboration of textual databanks, defined as a collection of homogeneous texts to be used as a textual resource for a specific task or for a particular language subset.

The second stage of this documentation work consists of the dynamization of the resources for the collection and further analysis of the reference material, primarily course catalogues from European universities. To this end, in addition to the compilation of course catalogues and specific course descriptions, the most common search method consists of locating the material in libraries or on the Internet using specific and advanced search strategies and criteria. Cabré (1999:19) establishes four types of data sources useful for translators: grammar sources, among which she mentions grammar books and style manuals; lexicographic sources, consisting of general dictionaries;

terminological sources, with information about the specialised field; and specialised sources, such as manuals and handbooks that provide specific information about a particular field of knowledge.

After the collection of the reference material, the third stage in the organisation of the documents and corpus design consists of the classification and selection of the material according to certain specific criteria. At this stage, the texts collected are classified into four different corpora: two monolingual corpora, one with the English texts and another one with the Spanish texts; one parallel corpus, with aligned segments of the texts in both languages obtained from translated texts or from texts published in both languages; and finally, a fourth corpus, called the reference corpus, which will include other source texts that do not meet the requirements to be included in one of the other types of corpora but which contain relevant information for the terminological work. For example, common reference documents, which are not specifically course catalogues, will be included in the reference corpus, as they are useful for the final task of terminology validation.

The next step is the development of the electronic corpus for further data processing. Simultaneously to corpus design, the different documents are identified using codes that indicate the date, language and source institution or author of the document. This code, labelled in the terminological file entry as source, will serve to identify the authority, reliability and validity of the term.

3.3. Phase 3: Elaboration of terminological databases

Finally, stage 3 consists of the exploitation of the resources and elaboration of the terminological databases. The process for the establishment of the working method in translation-oriented terminology management presented in this study consists of carrying out an analysis of the main proposals in terminology work up to now and combining them, in order to select the most pragmatic and functional aspects with which to define an operational structure that justifies the study of the terminology used in course catalogues.

The main difference between the systematic models and the translation-oriented terminology work approach is marked by the inherent limitations in the nature of the working environment, especially with regard to deadlines and the planning of the translation project, which inevitably leads to *ad hoc* terminology work being carried out in order to resolve the terminology problems detected during the initial phase of analysis of the original text.

4. Conclusions

The need for the systematization of translation-oriented terminological work in the form of phases as proposed in this paper is evident in view of the high number of inconsistencies found in the course catalogues studied.

For the establishment of a working method in translation-oriented terminology management, the starting point is the integration of consolidated procedures and protocols from disciplines with a clear influence on the translation process. Therefore, the contribution of this proposal comes not only from the analysis of previous terminology studies, but also from the application of the results of different interactions between terminology and translation in the work of translators.

The exhaustive analysis of the corpus of course catalogues revealed several other weaknesses in the drafting stage of course catalogues which go beyond the scope of this study, but which point to a line of research for future work on translation-oriented terminology.

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