

Selecting a translation equivalent: Factors to consider in the classroom

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The article focuses on the translation of terms in the Humanities, as well as the direct dependence of the translation equivalent on the mode of term coinage and its functioning. The authors argue that in the Humanities a lexical-semantic mode of term coinage is common, which makes the majority of terms consubstantial. This provision is developed in the article on the basis of Russian and English language materials. A number of contemporary English-Russian and Russian-English terminological dictionaries in various fields of the Humanities (politics, law, history) served as a data source for the research. The study relies on the methods of semantic analysis, dictionary definitions analysis, elements of system analysis and pragmatic analysis. The authors also describe the processes of terminologisation and determinologisation in the terminological systems of different fields of the Humanities and study various ways and methods of translation and equivalent screening.

KEYWORDS: semantic derivation, consubstantial term, terminologisation, determinologisation, diachronic approach, monosemantic term, polysemantic term



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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised world, integration and harmonisation of different nations' humanitarian views and concepts seems to be the inevitable platform of coexistence, if mankind is setting the goal of sustainable and secure development for everyone. The needs of international collaboration in various spheres of life stimulate mutual adaptation and coordination of humanitarian notions (including specialised terms) existing in different linguistic communities.

Without this co-ordination, it would be impossible for people to understand each other's way of life, objectives and prospects for the future.

That is why linguists see one of their primary purposes in analysing nations' worldviews reflected in language and researching the best methods of rendering that knowledge to those involved in intercultural communication. Our special interest lies in the ways Humanities terms correlate in different languages, the ways in which

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such terms are coined and how this knowledge may be systemised to be taught in class. All this taken together is the focus of the present paper.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Looking into the ways new terms are coined and then translated into another language cannot be confined to any one particular research method, as it is imperative to reveal different aspects of the process, namely semantic development in language history, its correlation with the possible similarities in general literary or colloquial language and its pragmatic load and the possibility for everything to be transmitted through the verbal arsenal of a different language.

The authors use the methods of semantic analysis, dictionary definitions analysis, elements of system analysis and pragmatic analysis to represent the linguistic material as a combination of the general and the individual, disclose the specific and recurrent features of the translation process and establish the norms to improve the quality of translation. A number of contemporary English-

Russian and Russian-English terminological dictionaries in various fields of the Humanities (politics, law, history) have been chosen as source materials for the research.

3. STUDY AND RESULTS

The distinction between the scientific and everyday interpretation of a concept and a word is fundamentally important in the study of terminology, particularly the terminology of the Humanities which often reflects not only the relevant object of nomination but also its pragmatic and psychological perception. In different theoretical studies on the essence of the word, there is a provision about the ‘closest’ and ‘peripheral’ meanings of the word. Hence, modern terminological science formulated a postulate on the realisation of different types of information depending on the correlation of the word with its everyday or scientific concept (Bowker, 2014; Kockaert & Steurs, 2015; Manik, 2015). Both fundamental and practically oriented studies dealing with the systemic nature of language have increasingly emphasised the necessity of a diachronic investigation of any systems and subsystems of language (Kageura, 2002; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2012; Ponomarenko, 2016). In other words, it is necessary to consider both the systemic nature of the terminology and its development in dynamics without placing these properties in opposition to one another. Furthermore, it is methodologically

reasonable to consider the terminological element and its connections with the entire system of terms in their historical development.

Semantic variability, or semantic derivation, is a characteristic feature of terminology in the Humanities. At certain times, in various national communities as well as within the boundaries of individual scientific areas, strictly defined word concepts may undergo some changes in semantics (meaning increment, change in selection characteristics), especially due to the rapid development of scientific and technical knowledge, culture and cross-lingual communication. Changes in the semantics of the term depend directly on a number of factors, both extralinguistic and purely linguistic (Anisimova, 2010; Avakova, 2006; Budykina, 2012).

For instance, it would be appropriate to refer to the linguistic reasons for changes in the coinage of used terms. To a certain extent, the translation of a term depends on the way the term is formed. A good example might be the terminology of diplomacy, where over 85% of terms are loanwords and expressions, approximately 30% of them being terms that entered the English language more than 450 years ago but have remained almost unchanged (they did not undergo an assimilation process) (Avakova, 2006). Thus, the time factor is not crucial in the process of assimilation (and therefore, in choosing how to

translate a particular term). For our purposes, the crucial factor is the method of term coinage, the way it entered a certain system of terminology. For instance, in political terminology, the percentage of consubstantial terms exceeds 95% (Raymond, 1992). Still, a different method of term coinage is quite typical of this terminology system – metaphorisation (based on either formal or functional resemblance). For instance, *a lame duck* – a person, business, etc. that is experiencing difficulties and needs to be helped. Through metaphorisation based on formal resemblance, some terms have appeared and already entered dictionaries, such as the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE, 2015):

lame duck president – a president, whose powers will soon expire;

lame duck candidate – a candidate who failed at the elections;

lame duck country – a country that has lost its former influence;

lame duck congressman – a member of the congress not elected for a new term, but who still has the right to work in the congress before the end of the session.

These examples demonstrate how metaphorisation leads to new term coinage. This mode is very

productive in the political terminology system and is actualised in parallel in different languages. Compare the definitions of the same notions in the explanatory *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE, 2015) and the *English-Russian Dictionary of Politics* (Kramarevski, 2008), one of the popular dictionaries in Russian lexicography offering definitions and translations of political terminology:

carpetbagger – someone who tries to become active in the political life of another area for their own advantage (LDCE, 2015); a political adventurer, dodger, rascal (Kramarevski, 2008);

blockbuster – a book or film that is very good or successful (LDCE, 2015); 1. tremendous success; 2. a dealer in real estate (Kramarevski, 2008).

In the above examples, one can consider the entire process of word transition from common literary language, its terminologisation through metaphor, a change in meaning, and then its transformation into a proper term. Thus, the common literary meaning of *blockbuster* only partially (the metaphor is the result) entered the semantics of the term, in particular, the seme (elementary unit of meaning) *success* is evidently actualised in both usages of the word. Further development of the term can also be traced back to the 1930s-40s when real estate dealers were well-known to be a successful and wealthy cohort

of American society. Then, the term *blockbuster* was likely to mean a *successful real estate trader*. Today, this term has become polysemantic with two semes in its meaning: *success* and *real estate trader*, although the second definition is hardly ever used in modern British or American English.

Hence, the initial common literary meaning is the main one. Most political terms exist in general English usage and when they become proper terms, their definitions are specified and detailed; the scope of the meaning of a term narrows in comparison with the semantic scope of a word in general English usage.

The changes in the scope of meaning (expansion, narrowing and specification) are lexical processes typical of any terminology system. The process of changing the scope of the meaning of a term can be based on a number of principles.

First is the traditional or historical principle. Terms relating to another historical epoch or culture are transferred to the present. For instance, the term *senate* in Ancient Rome meant *the supreme authority*, i.e. the state council. In tsarist Russia from 1711 to 1917, it was the highest legislative and judicial-administrative institution. At present, the Senate is the upper legislative chamber of the parliament in many countries (e.g. the USA, France, and Australia) (Egorova, 2012). What is witnessed here is a narrowing in the scope of

meaning which, in its general meaning, previously indicated the highest authority. In Russia, its scope was further expanded to the judicial and administrative body as well as the highest legislative authority. Today, the meaning of the term has narrowed – it now stands for the supreme (but a smaller part of the whole) legislative chamber of parliament.

Another example is the term *tribunal*, which means ‘a court of justice set up to deal with a particular kind of problem’ (LDCE, 2015, p. 308). The term *tribunal* originated from *tribune*, used in ancient Rome to denote ‘an official elected by people to protect the interests and rights of plebeians from the encroachments of patricians’ (Egorova, 2012, p. 212). Later, another meaning of the term *tribune* appeared – a public figure, distinguished speaker and publicist (Kramarevski, 2008; Ozhegov, 2012).

One way of coining new terms may be through the transformation of a proper name into a common noun with subsequent terminologisation. Thus, the political term **Бойкот** was borrowed into Russian from the English *boycott*. In 1880, Irish tenants first applied this measure to their estate manager, the Englishman Ch. K. Boycott. The scope of meaning of this term in Russian and English is compared below:

Бойкот (from English *boycott*) – 1. a method of

political and economic struggle, consisting in the complete or partial termination of relations with an individual, organisation, or state and refusal to participate in any activities. This measure was first applied in 1880 by the Irish tenants to the estate manager, an Englishman called Ch.K. Boycott. 2. the termination of relations with someone as a protest.

The proper name *Boycott* was transformed into a common noun and then into a verb – *to boycott*. Notably, the meaning of this term, particularly the figurative one, was fixed in general English usage: ‘a boycott – the organised shunning of an individual, event, or business in protest at the politics they represent (McLean & McMillan, 2009, p. 74).

In its figurative meaning, the term *boycott* is widely used in general English usage: (v) – *to refuse to buy something, or to take part in something as a way of protesting: e.g. We will boycott all products tested on animals*; (n) – *an act of boycotting something, or a period of time when it is boycotted: e.g. The boycott of South African fruit in the 1970s* (LDCE, 2015, p. 42).

There are a number of terms borrowed from general English usage, which, over time, have acquired a completely new meaning to become ‘fully-edged’ terms included in professional discourse. However, most borrowings are

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semantically specified and detailed, while some are either used metaphorically or undergo changes in meaning. The change in the term’s meaning (in comparison with the general literary meaning of the word) is very productive in the Humanities.

Examples in political terminology are (LDCE, 2015):

hawk – supporter of an interventionist foreign policy, maybe through armed intervention;

spin doctor – a political aide interpreting events and communication to support a particular point of view;

fat cat – a wealthy and privileged person;

coattails – to rise on the coattails of someone is to gain power by following an influential person;

orchestration – the harmonious organisation of a political or social movement, project or event;

zip gun – a homemade single shot weapon;

slush fund – a fund for bribing officials or other illicit purposes;

to work the system – to interpret rules and regulations to secure a personal advantage.

The examples show that although most terms preserve their original literary meaning, some political terms used politically may undergo a full change in meaning.

Is a reverse transition possible? With an increase in the degree of terminologisation, can a common literary word become a term with different meaning and usage? Will the inverse proposition be true, i.e. the fact that with a decrease in the degree of terminologisation, the definition of a term eventually becomes almost equivalent to the definition of a general English-usage word?

Keeping in mind that terminological systems in the Humanities are examined diachronically, in accordance with the general laws of development, it is possible to consider the manifestation of semantic derivation using the example of a single terminological system, for example, politics. The basis of politics is, supposedly, the mutual engagement of participating sides directed at finding common ground or at least an acceptable solution to a particular issue, usually through a negotiating process. Consequently, an indispensable condition for its success is mutual

understanding of the parties of terms used in the negotiating process. This depends on adequate translation of terminology.

Political terminology may give us an endless number of examples of determinologisation, probably because political terms are most frequently used by the media and picked up by non-professionals. Determinologisation relies on semantic derivation, a kind of phraseological unit formation process, since the popularisation of certain terminological concepts leads to the adoption of these terms by a wide range of communities. For example, the legal term *law* makes up part of a number of phraseological units, such as these examples from LDCE (2015):

to sit in judgement – to criticise; to make one's case; to present one's case;

special pleading – arguments that avoid aspects of a situation unfavourable to your case;

to settle out of court – come to an agreement without appeal to an official or legal body.

Apparently, this phenomenon can be accounted for by the fact that political science and jurisprudence and accordingly the terms that they use, are part of everyone's life. Hence, their widespread use by society at large, and established collocations are numerous in general

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English usage. For example, *to lay down the law* – to dictate one's will; *to go into the law* – to become a lawyer; *to lay down the law* – to dogmatise.

It is becoming common that among many terminology systems in the Humanities, legal and political terminology is among the main 'supplier' of established phraseological units. Notably, the polysemantic nature of the term greatly influences phraseology that is often accompanied by semantic correlation, which itself is embodied in definitions, as in some examples from LDCE (2015) and Kramarevski (2008):

- meaning expansion of the main seme: *lady-killer* – a man with a reputation for charming women;
- preservation of connotation and associative chain: *dead man* – a dead person, an empty bottle; *to do justice* – to administer justice; to show appreciation and respect;
- addition of a new seme: *to be in at the kill* – to witness the most exciting moment;

dressed to kill – dressed to impress people;

- fixing the main seme of the terminological element in the semantics of the phraseological unit: *to lay down the law – to dictate one's will.*

The following phraseological units are coined from the English term *knight*, using the honourable title bestowed by the English crown: *knight of the road* – a highwayman; *knight of fortune* – an adventurer. The highest degree of terminologisation is the coinage of proverbs and sayings based on legal terms, as in *rough justice; not treated fairly; friends are thieves of time; lawmakers should not be lawbreakers, etc.* Thus, terminologisation, the process of transition of a term or terminological combination into general English usage, is often accompanied by a change of the terminological seme (elimination or generalisation), the development of new meanings or a change in the connotative shade of meaning. From the point of view of diachronic analysis, the process of terminologisation covers terms that express basic concepts constituting the core of the terminological system and, therefore, function in the language much longer than the peripheral ones, which increases the degree of their penetration into general English usage. Another approach to the study of terms is to consider them from the viewpoint of their functioning. Thus, terms can be divided into three categories: universal, unique and authorial (Anisimova, 2010).

'We are clearly witnessing the beginning of the process of the term's transition from the unique to universal category'

Universal terms emphasise the general linguistic nature of the phenomena behind them. Moreover, international variants are convenient for the coinage of various derivatives.

Unique terms include names or items that can be found in one or more languages. This group comprises terms that have developed within the scientific traditions of a particular country or region and are not used outside them. Thus, the definitions of universal and unique terms refer to settled terms which have become widely used although they sometimes have specific differences in different contexts. It is these terms that should be included in professional terminological dictionaries.

Authorial terms are those devised and introduced by an individual author for a particular work with the aim of defining a specific concept or describing a specific situation. Authorial terms are frequently reflected in political writing. Consider, for example, the term *long hot summer* which originated in the black ghettos of large American cities in the mid 19th century. It meant *'the climate in which inner city tensions boil over into riots'*.

Around 100 years later (in the 1960s), this term, figuratively speaking, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to be used in Britain in almost the same sense to describe *'violence on summer nights in Britain's inner cities and run-down housing estates'* (Roeder, 2006, p. 319). We are clearly witnessing the beginning of the process of the term's transition from the unique to universal category.

Another example of a term's complete transition from unique to universal is the term *lynching* – taking hold of a person thought to be guilty of a crime and killing him, especially by hanging, without a legal trial (LDCE, 2015, p. 108). The term first appeared in the unique category at the end of the 18th century in the USA after the infamous captain William Lynch (1742-1820), a Virginia magistrate who on 22nd September 1780 formed a band to clear *'Pittsylvania County of unlawful and abandoned wretches'* (Roeder, 2006, p. 202). Two hundred years later, Martin Luther King wrote: *'It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important'* (Roeder, 2006, p. 274). The term *lynching* turned from a unique term (used in a certain region) into a universal term (in this case, an international and interlinguistic term).

The process of the development of a term is also observed in the third group of terms, called *'authorial terms'*. The special role of these terms

consists in their becoming distinctive features of a particular concept, research or creative work or a public speech. For example, a widely used political term *genocide* entered the English language after the Second World War. The term was invented by Professor Raphael Lemkin of Duke University for official documents of War Criminals in 1945 (Raymond, 1992, p. 214). It took less than 50 years for the term to become universal, which is not surprising in this case considering the global influence of the Nuremberg Trials all over the world.

In addition, universal criteria can be considered comprehensive if their selection is made by combining the deductive approach to linguistic analysis, i.e. an analysis of the characteristic features of human thought, with an empirical approach aimed at analysing language units with a lower level of abstraction (e.g. terms).

4. DISCUSSION

According to many researchers, the main reasons leading to mistakes in translation come from the inability to find an appropriate Russian language equivalent for the translation of an English word or a lexical combination (Anisimova & Arkhipova, 2014; Malakhova, 2017; Malyuga & Orlova, 2016).

One of the specific features of translating ESP terminology is the need to build equivalents of

foreign terms that cannot be found in the native language. It is quite natural that the translator can create a term only when he or she knows for sure that there is no corresponding equivalent, or in case the existing term does not meet the basic requirements and should be replaced. The coinage of equivalents should be approached with caution since a term created by the translator and used in the translation text in the native language becomes a phenomenon of this language and continues to exist independently, which in its turn, increases the responsibility of translators to get it right first time.

When creating a term, the translator should pay special attention to both the precision of conveying the meaning of a foreign term and the relationship between the term being created and other elements of the native language terminological system (Bowker, 2014; Kageura, 2002; Manik, 2015). One cannot create a term that coincides in form with a term already used in the language that has a different meaning. Also, one cannot use terms and expressions that allow for different interpretations. Making up a term, one should aim to ensure that it naturally enters the existing terminological system of the specific knowledge field and is not seen as something foreign. Therefore, it is desirable to coin new terms according to the pattern of the already existing ones. This approach should be studied and analysed in great detail.

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A ‘good’ translation of a term implies that each term in the text is equivalent in meaning to a translated term. It is extremely important, therefore, to take into account the diachronic aspect of the translation problem. It often happens that terms belonging to a certain terminological system were not transferred into one language from another but were created in several languages (either simultaneously or not) with one and the same external form being used to express different concepts. For instance, in English there is the term *integral* with the meaning of *whole*, *monolithic*, *Integral structure – monolithic construction*, *monolithic panel* (LDCE, 2015, p. 69). Thus, in the sentence *‘there is no sign in the Britannia (a civil aircraft) of any turning towards the ‘integral’ method of construction’*, the words *‘integral method’* should be interpreted as *‘a construction which requires the use of monolithic panels’*.

There are two reasons for the discrepancy of the meanings of terms in different languages. Often, the discrepancy arises because the same basic original meaning expressed by a term can be associated with similar (or even identical) signs of

different objects of definition. For example, the semantic structure of the English term *synchronism* and the same Russian term (from the Greek *syn* = together and *chronos* = time) conveys the idea of the coincidence of several phenomena or processes in time. However, in English, this key feature characterises the coincidence in time of both frequencies and phases while in the Russian language – just frequencies. Thus, terms, the semantic structure of which reflect the same feature, may express different concepts in different languages.

Another reason for the incongruity in translation can be that different languages take into account different aspects of semantic structure. Various features reflected by the same semantic structure of such terms relate to different concepts. For instance, the semantic structure of the term *cycle* (Greek *Kyklos* – *wheel, circle, circuit*) includes two main original meanings: one associated with the geometric concept of a circle and the other developed on the basis of the first, associated with the notion of a complex of some phenomena or process. The Russian term does not include the first meaning while in English there is a term *cycle* (noun) short for a *bicycle* that developed from the first of the main original meanings. *Cycle* can also be used as a verb.

Unfortunately, it is quite common for dictionaries not to register the most frequent case of a term's

usage. For example, the political and legal term *authority* is polysemantic. In the English legal dictionary, three meanings of this term are registered (1) while the English-Russian dictionary offers as many as seven (2).

(1) *authority* – 1. The legal power of a public official to act in an official capacity; 2. The power to act on behalf of another and bind the other by such actions; 3. A source of information or insight into how to interpret and apply the law in a particular situation (Gifis, 2010, p. 43).

(2) *authority* – 1. power, absoluteness, sphere of competence; 2. regulatory body, administrative board; 3. source of law, legislation, precedent, court judgement, document; 4. competent specialist, authoritative statement; 5. credibility; 6. proof, grounding; 7. letter of authorisation, mandate, permit (Ozhegov, 2012).

However, the analysis of the functioning of this term has shown that in most cases it is translated by the Russian term **КОМПЕТЕНТНЫЙ ОРГАН** meaning *authoritative body* – an equivalent that is not registered in any English-Russian dictionary. For example, a translation from English into Russian might go like this:

If no appointing authority has been agreed upon by the parties, the name or names of one or more institutions or persons, one of whom would serve

as appointing authority. Если стороны ранее не договорились о компетентном органе, наименования одного или нескольких учреждений либо лиц, одно из которых могло бы выступать в качестве компетентного органа.

5. CONCLUSION

In the Humanities, a lexical-semantic method of coining new terms is common, which makes the majority of terms consubstantial. Mistakes in the translation of terms more often than not can be accounted for by the fact that while in one language a particular term is polysemantic, in another language the corresponding term has only one meaning. A translator can make a mistake

attributing all the meanings of a polysemantic Russian term to a monosemantic English term or, vice versa, can reduce the semantic content of a polysemantic English term to the only meaning of a Russian term. Although in one meaning such terms can be equivalent to each other, they can still turn out to be 'false friends of a translator'. Terms should be scrutinised during the translation process via both synchronic and diachronic analysis. If a translator fails to use the systemic approach, i.e. fails to consider the existing terminological system and determine the place for the new term in the hierarchical conceptual system with all the historical and linguistic characteristics of the terminological system development, the outcome will prove a fiasco.

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