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Translating Specialised Texts: From Terms to Communication

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In the early days of LSP studies (language for special purposes; *Fachsprache*; *fachspråk*; *langue de spécialité*), it was terminology that was often prioritised as a defining characteristic of this variety of language that had been a means of communication for centuries (von Hahn 1983: 12-47; Fluck 1985: 27-32). For example, in Lothar Hoffmann's ground-breaking book, first published in 1976 — *Kommunikationsmittel Fachsprache* ('Special Language as a Means of Communication') — the first and most extensive part of the first chapter is devoted to terminology. In reviewing the history of LSP studies, Hoffmann points out that:

Die Besonderheiten der Fachsprachen wurden sowohl von Philologen als auch von Fachleuten zuerst in ihrem Wortschatz erkannt, und auch heute noch ist die Terminologie eines der wichtigsten Gebiete der Fachsprachenforschung¹ (Hoffmann 1985: 21)².

The terms of a domain are indeed a very salient part of any LSP text, as they help to mark the text as belonging to a particular domain and play a major part in the mapping and presentation of the knowledge space and perspective presented in the text. As LSP studies progressed and developed through the 1980s and 1990s and into the new millennium, the scope of LSP studies broadened from the linguistic features studied by Hoffmann and others, to the philosophy of science, cultural aspects of LSP, LSP and technology (particularly in relation to terminology), text and pragmatics. The early theme of LSP translation was extended with studies focusing on particular language pairs, particular genres and particular textual features. Further developments in knowledge representation (closely linked to terminology studies), cognition, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and visual aspects of LSP texts followed. All these developments can be traced in the proceedings of the European Symposia on Language for Special Purposes³.

In the UK, the tradition of LSP studies has continued to focus primarily on didactic aspects of LSP in the form of English for Special Purposes (ESP, i.e. under the disciplinary umbrella of TESOL (Teaching Languages to Speakers of Other Languages). Whilst didactics was beginning to recede as the main focus of LSP studies, as noted in the Introduction to the 6th European Symposium on LSP (Laurén and Nordman 1989: x), in the UK, LSP (as also terminology studies) is to this day still most likely to feature in relation to particular applications such as ESP, and more recently, translation. This current issue of *JoSTrans* reflects this later trend.

Developments in technology and shared concerns between Artificial Intelligence and terminology studies, particularly in the area of knowledge elicitation and representation, led to new perspectives on the structuring

of terminology resources and their compilation; a series of conferences which began in 1987 on Terminology and Knowledge Engineering (TKE) aimed, for example, to exploit the obvious synergies between the two disciplines (see also Ahmad 2001). The 2012 TKE conference website talks of “the symbiosis of terminology and knowledge engineering” and notes that “TKE has developed towards wider fields in knowledge transfer for special language communication in a multilingual global society” (<http://www.oeg-upm.net/tke2012/>).

Two of the key areas of common interest to emerge at TKE have been the use of ontologies and of inheritance mechanisms in hierarchical relations to model domain knowledge and to capture relations between what scholars working in the onomasiological tradition call concepts. This interdisciplinary and broadening perspective for terminology studies mirrors the development of new perspectives in translation studies, which has also been enriched by association with other disciplines over the last decades (including sociology, psycholinguistics and cultural studies).

These developments actually reflect the viewpoint expressed in a prescient and seminal article by Wüster almost 40 years earlier on the interdisciplinary nature of terminology studies (Wüster 1974). What remained outside Wüster’s standardisation-based framework, however — closely related to the fields of science and technology — was the communicative aspect of terms as word forms in text and the functional role which terminological variation can play.

The widening brief of studies of LSP and LSP translation has indeed influenced the way in which terminology studies are conceived. Where the early study of terminology in the Vienna School was focused on the regulation of use in the interests of unambiguous reference in technical and scientific subject fields (as in Wüster 1974), and terminological resources for translation purposes were conceived of as bilingual lists (Felber 1984), new studies began to emerge which treated terms as integral parts of texts with more complex functionality beyond unambiguous reference. An edited collection of papers on indeterminacy in terminology and LSP (Antia 2007) is a case in point, although once again such work was foreshadowed, if only cursorily by, for example, Hoffmann and von Hahn on coherence (1985: 230; 1983: 120-1) and on precision and vagueness by von Hahn (1983: 98-100). It is notable that both Hoffmann’s and von Hahn’s books contain the word ‘communication’ in their titles.

Whilst studies by translation scholars have been instrumental in effecting a communicatively based re-evaluation of how terms are studied (see, for instance, Rogers 2009) — probably because translators, in their unavoidable dealings with texts, soon realise that denotative equivalence is often hard to establish — alternative approaches to the onomasiological, concept-based view of terminology also developed out of a semasiological

approach to the description of terms, using text corpora (see also Ahmad and Rogers 2001). Temmerman (2000) is a good example of this trend towards description, taking her examples from the life sciences and arguing that “words have the power to *move* figuratively [...] because of the role that words in language play in the understanding of the world by each individual” (2000: xiii, *emphasis in the original*). In other words, a cognitive aspect is introduced. One example of the way in which this approach, as exemplified by Temmerman, sheds light on the formation and use of terms—‘even’ in the natural sciences—is through its analysis of metaphor in terminology as a way of using the more familiar to understand the less familiar.

The current issue of *JoSTrans* aims to present a range of views on terminology and phraseology in relation to specialist translation, mirroring many of the themes outlined above in terms of terminology and knowledge, the use of corpora, figurative language and terminology, the structuring of termbases and relations between entries, the particular terminological needs of translators, and terminological variation.

More specifically, the papers cover the following topics: meeting translators’ needs in terminology, the implications of phraseological expressions for the constitution of termbases, dealing with variation in terminography and ‘phraseography’, collocations and termbases, representing terminological relations in termbases, the evaluation of a terminological knowledge base by trainee translators, multilingual corpora and terminology exchange, the use of bilingual comparable corpora to create terminology resources, secondary term formation in multilingual EU communication, and metaphors and metonyms in terminology.

I would like to thank the editorial board of *JoSTrans* for the opportunity to bring together what I hope readers will find to be a stimulating collection of papers on an interdisciplinary field which continues to develop in not only interesting but also challenging ways.

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Biography

Margaret Rogers, Professor of Translation and Terminology Studies, is Director of the Centre for Translation Studies in the School of English and Languages at the University of Surrey, UK. During the 1990s, she was involved in a number of EU-supported projects developing software tools for terminology and translation applications. Her more recent work deals with text-linguistic aspects of terms in specialist translation and creativity in translation. Editor of two monograph series on translation with Multilingual Matters and Palgrave Macmillan, she is also the founder of the Terminology Network in the Institute for Translation and Interpreting and a founder member of the Association for Terminology and Lexicography. She teaches text analysis, research methods, terminology and technical writing on the MA translation programmes at Surrey, and is founder of the ITI Terminology Network. She can be reached at: m.rogers@surrey.ac.uk.



Notes

¹ The distinguishing features of special languages were recognised not only by philologists but also by subject specialists as residing primarily in their vocabularies. Even today, terminology is one of the most important areas of interest in special-language research. (*my translation*)

² Reference is made here to Hoffmann's 2nd edition of *Kommunikationsmittel Fachsprache* (1985) rather than the 1st edition (1976), which I haven't been able to access.

³ For a list of publications related to the LSP Symposia between 1979 and 2002, see Ahmad and Rogers 2007: 9-10).