Translators as Terminologists [*]

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1 - The importance of **Language for Special Purposes** (LSP) is rapidly gaining momentum in modern society due to an "information explosion" necessitating a multidirectional knowledge transfer and an indispensable **access to specialized knowledge**. Also the general public, who are neither trained nor fully prepared, must be informed by decision-makers about a host of topics, which have a direct bearing on the planet and its inhabitants, such as "shifts in the social and bioplanetary environment, alternative energy resources, genetic testing for hereditary characteristics of diseases, and much more" in order to 'enlist their support" (de Beaugrande 1995:V:19). Terminology is closely linked to Discourse for Special Purpose (DSP) with its ramifications into fields and sub-fields of knowledge and is conducted among specialists (**insiders**) and between them and non-specialists (**outsiders**). United Nations translators, in most cases, are probably situated within the latter category, as it is impossible to specialize in the very wide spectrum of subjects dealt with in UN fora and documentation, which follow an intensively specialized course in a multilingual direction. This is a veritable dilemma.

2 - The term "terminology" covers three concepts (Felber 1984): (a) Terminology science, which is an inter-and trans-disciplinary field of knowledge dealing with **concepts** and their representation, (b) An aggregate of terms representing the system of concepts of a given subject, and (c) A publication in which terms represent a system of concepts. The conceptual aspect of terminology is thus emphasized. Also, terminology is fundamentally intended for: (a) Ordering of knowledge in the form of conceptual classification of each scientific discipline, (b) Transfer of knowledge, skills and technology, (c) Formulation and dissemination of scientific and technical information, and (e) Storage and retrieval of scientific and technical information (Felber 1984:1).

It is a main vector in knowledge transfer, and it is vital for knowledge transfer. When the terms are well-defined, communication is carried in a suitable manner.

3 - Neology and standardization play a cardinal role in terminology. A neologism is defined by Webster's, Dictionary as "a new word or a new meaning for established words" and "the use of new words or of new meanings for established words". Neology is "the novelty of words and phrases". The concept of neology was introduced in the 1960s and has its origin in linguistics (Felber 1987). In Arabic, neology problems are solved through Arabization, i.e. transfer into Arabic. Three methods are recommended in order to achieve this purpose: the first one is to Arabize the term, i.e. to give it an authentic Arabic character following the patterns of the Arabic language. AL-Jawhari (d. 1005) stated that "Arabization is the use by Arabs of foreign words, adapting them to their usage and fashion". The second method, advocated by the illustrious grammarian Sibawaih (d.796), is more flexible as it is allowed either

to follow Arabic forms or to borrow the term and reproduce it as it is through transliteration. The third method is to find an Arabic equivalent. Translation either from or into Arabic has to be as close to the original as possible, but sounds are only reproduced by letters of the alphabet in varying degrees of accuracy. Arabic is still confronted with the problems of transliterating the letters "p", "g", "u" (in French) and "v", while those letters are encountered in Farsi and sometimes adopted by Arabic users. Transliteration norms have been established by the Cairo Academy of the Arabic Language, for Arabic, and by the International Standardization Organization (ISO) and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) (ID/352/ Rev.1 (SPEC.)). Complete equivalence is impossible in most cases. Neology is among the characteristics of terminology in the United Nations system. It is engendered by the **newness of subjects** and current affairs dealt with in UN meetings and documents, reflecting the preoccupations of our contemporary society with its many intricacies and requirements. It may sometimes necessitate an **annotated translation** of the neologism in order to clarify the new concept in the target language. Medieval Arabic translators were faced with the formidable task of finding or rather coining a plethora of new terms. They often resorted to **phonological adaptation** and transliteration in Arabic. Terms were modified, improved and refined at a late stage by other translators. This was the case of the translation by Istifan Ibn Basil, a disciple of Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, who translated the Book of Plants of Dioscurides. He left a large number of names of plants in a transliterated form. Hunayn Ibn Ishaq revised this version prepared by Ibn Basil and gave equivalent Arabic terms. That book was translated three times and then persistently kept under review for full **Arabization** purposes. It was later revised by Ibn Al-Jazzar (in Al-Ictimad), Al-

Ghafiqi (in Aladwiya al Mufrada) and Ibn Al Bitar (in Aljamic) and interpreted by Ibn Juljul, Al-Nabati, Ibn Al-Bitar and Ghulam al Hurra. D. Sélekovitch (1975:56) gives the example of "gratte-ciel" (literally translated from "sky-scraper") which became "tour" after the construction of la Tour de Montparnasse. **Neology** entails the issue of **authority** which is raised at various levels, ranging from translators to revisers, and administrators, with the actual involvement of and evaluation by end-users (acceptability). De Beaugrande (1991b) states rightly that "a terminology asserts a claim of **authorization**. Here, the relevant function is to signal that the instantiated **complexes of knowledge** are authorized by the established **consensus** in the field".

4 - On the occasion of the UN Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 5-14 September 1994) many articles were published in Egyptian newspapers criticizing the pre-session documentation and particularly the basic background document. Those articles consistently raised **neology** and **standardization** problems, questioning some term concepts, and unleashing political and religious divergences, especially regarding "abortion" and other controversial matters. Translators were used as scapegoats amidst frantic political debates. For example, the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram* (24 and 31 August 1994 September 1994, and 20 March 1995). Some terms were rightly criticized, like: sanitation (الصرف أو المرافق الصحية) التصحـــاح (الجفاف), oral rehydration (محلول الإماهة الفموية) (الصحـــي), and breast feeding (الرضاعة الثدية ,(الرضاعة الطبيعية). However, in other instances, the objections are rather questionable: the term "projection" corresponds to "إسقاط" (See Nasr Dictionary of Economics and Commerce printed under the auspices of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development). This use will allow the distinction between "prevision", "forecast" and "prognostic". Also, there is a difference

between "ecology" and "environment". The neologism "ايكولوجيا" for ecology is a welcome addition. A possible Arabic equivalent is "بيّأ" or "تبايؤ" or "علــم البيئـة" or "البيئيات". The term "مجتمعــي" is used at the United Nations for "community", and the term "محلي" corresponds to "local". The term "قومي" has a nationalistic denotation. "مســـتدامة" is used for "self-sustained", as "متواصـــل" corresponds to « continual », « incessant » and « persistent », and the term (مستمر) to "continuous". The term "compatible partnership" is equivalent to "شراكة متوافقـة" and not "شراكة فعالة" as suggested in the newspaper. Usually, when the "thing" (or concept) behind the term is imported and fully adapted in the target language, a designation more consistent with the genius of the language is adopted. UN Arabic translators, when faced with neology, always have in mind the necessity of avoiding **synonymy** and **polysemy**. Standardization remains a problem as it is quasi-impossible to detect all existing neologisms in the absence of a comprehensive up-to-date compilation work.

5 - However, the work of UN Arabic translators is clearly recognized by academic and specialist circles, as was the case in the Conference on Arab Cooperation in Terminology: Science and Practice, Tunis, 7-10 July 1986, the International Conference on Standardization and Unification in Theory and Practice, Tunis, 13-17 March 1989, and the Arab Conference on Scientific Writing in Arabic: Facts and Prospects, Benghazi, Libya, 10-12 March 1990. The *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie*, Paris, 6-8 March 1990, has also recognized the necessity of utilizing the UN French terminology, and generally speaking, the UN terminology is sometimes adopted by the mass media and "it happens that the new terms included in UN bulletins are eventually adopted by specialists working in the field concerned". (Tabory 1988)

6 - As already mentioned, the main characteristic of UN documentation is the frequent encounter of neologisms in **recurrent and multiple contexts** and the **regularity of themes** covered by documents prepared for periodical meetings and discussions. This offers the tremendous advantage of continuous and gradual checking and improving. Rules for coining neologisms have been set by the Cairo Academy of the Arabic Language, and translators are expected to use them as guidelines. Those rules have been reproduced by Ahmad Shafiq Al-Khatib in his *New dictionary of scientific and technical terms*. One of the successful instances is the term "Satil" (ساتل) used now as an equivalent to "satellite". This term has both an Arabic and non-Arabic root. According to Al Mucjam al wasit of the Cairo Academy of Arabic Language it is derived from the verb satala which means to follow each other, to trail, and to track. This usage is the more interesting as it offers possibilities of derivation while the term used previously did not. This clearly shows that the procedure Arabization, i.e. the adoption of a borrowed term in Arabic with the preservation of its root and the safeguard of the forms and spirit of the Arabic language, may be the best way to facilitate communication between Arab and non-Arab scientists. The term "tabic Istinaci" (تابع اصطناعي) (lit. "Artificial follower") was used in United Nations documents. Other terms are still in use in Arab countries: tabic Sinaci (تابع صنـــاعي) (lit. "Industrial follower") and qamar Sinaci (قمـــر صنــاعي) (lit. "Industrial moon"). Neology is closely associated with **standardization, synonymy and polysemy** and a translator must always bear in mind the necessity of standardized use within the System and should engage in a **disambiguation** process in such a way that terms disambiguate "each other by means of **mutual meaning restriction**". (Papegaaij and Schubert 1988:74) As neology is characterized by instability and transition, a

term is increasingly subject to review and revision until it is accepted. **Acceptance** is reached when translators use it collectively without any reluctance and when the term is preferably adopted by participants in UN meetings or outside the System (mass media, official reports, etc). This is the case of Satil. The door is and should always be open to change if a better alternative is suggested. While terminology at the United Nations is processed in an industry-like fashion, the standard of quality is ever-improving on the basis of feedback from all kinds of users.

7 - Another issue of utmost relevance is **acceptability**, which is applied by de Beaugrande to texts. At the micro-level a text is considered to be correct if it is accepted. This is normally achievable once trust is established between users and translators, who rely on language parallelism, with an adjustment between texts in the six languages. Unfortunately, experts are most probably not competent to do so, as their approach is **monodimentional**. Translators and users should engage in a continuous dialogue for a better output. There are two categories of neologisms, those **completely new** and those already used but **not yet stable**. Their number is restricted to a given subject, however complex thet may be. With regular translation of the same series of documents, translators quickly get familiarized with those neologisms, provided that they are duly recorded in terminology bulletins, which are provisional in their character. Mereover, as Séleskovitch (1975:42) concluded, on the basis of Jumpelt's work (1961), the number of frequent key technical terms is anyway limited in a given text. For example, after the transfer of the Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) to the Vienna International Centre, in the second half of 1993, texts of that Committee were extremely problematic in view of the neologisms employed therein. Now, translation is more

comfortable in view of the frequency of those terms, as an English-Arabic bulletin was immediately issued (March 1994). This denotes the importance of bulletins in LSP translation. Language potentialities, particularly derivational possibilities, should be fully utilized.

8 - Another borrowing from text linguistics which is relevant to terminological work at the United Nations is **intertextuality**, which also related to standardization and harmonization. **Terminological intertextuality** is as important as **acceptability**. According to de Beaugrande, it "concerns the factors which make utilization of some concepts dependent on knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts". It "addresses the obvious but poorly understood condition that producing or receiving one text demands a prior experience with other texts, notably one of the same type and discourse domain". Intertextuality is extremely important within the United Nations for obvious reasons, as it is a warrant for standardization. Documents and reference material are constantly built upon and referred to. This is a **privileged position** as it allows improvement and therefore favours acceptability. Texts come within **a sequence of previous and ulterior texts**. This gives translators the opportunity to ponder on new terms and check their correctness, although the range for manoevering is rather limited.

9 - Translators are the first to get the **shock of neologisms**. They are the main **terminology producers** within the multilingual setting of the UN system, because once a term is originally created by an expert, in his/her own language, which is normally English, corresponding terms are coined and transferred by translators, who are best equipped to undertake this task in the United Nations, as experts do not have a similar comparative capability to ensure language **parallelism**. Terminology is a major component of a text.

10 - There are so many translation theories and opinions differ regarding translation units. Even the German schools consider the text as whole, thus adopting a holistic approach. For the UN documentation, Snell-Hornby's integrated approach to translation, making no difference between text types, is adopted. A text is a mixture, and a scientific text may have literary components. The unit is the sentence. According to Sinclair (1994:17), "The text is the sentence that is in front of us when an act of reading is in progress. Each sentence then is a new beginning to the text. Each sentence organizes language and the world for that particular location in the text, not dependent on anything else". This is the most advanced theory in text linguistics. Each sentence is composed of words and terms. The sentence-by-sentence approach was adopted by Hunayn Ibn Ishaq who was a post eminent Arab scholar/translator in the 9th century, under the dual influence of the heavily literal Syriac translation school and the Arabic bayan, which defies any precise definition, but which is characterized by clarity, elegance, conciseness and eloquence. It is based on **skopos theory**, or end-user orientation. This principle is also stressed in linguistics, and not only in translation theory. Courlthard (1994:5) considers that: "Because texts are designed for a **specific audience**, once they exist, they define that audience; indeed, as no writer can create even a single sentence without a target **Imagined Reader**, almost every sentence provides some clue(s) about this Reader which allows any **Real Reader** to build up communicatively a picture of his/her **Imagined Counterpart**." The ideal situation is created when the real reader is the imagined one, when the translator is treated as a first real reader.

11 - In addition to terminology, **phraseology** is destined to play an important role in the two LSP domains, scientific and legal spheres. From the phraseological angle, the **"combined-ness of words"** or **"fixation or word combination"** and **multi-word terms** are studied. Three main criteria for distinguishing between **phraseological units** and **free collocations** have been determined by: **idiomacity, stability** and **lexical unity**. The major segments of UN texts are either terms or phrases. In legal texts there are four types of phrases: (a) **"prefabricated"**, or ready-made and directly prescribed by law, (b) **"indirectly prescribed by law"**, (c)**"recommended"** to avoid ambiguity, and (d) **"routine phrases"**; their use is advisable for the sake of time. (Kjaer 1990: 21-29). The Arab experience has shown that 99 per cent of the translators who were engaged in translation work were scholars, i.e. specialists. The cognitive background is extremely important and three interactive types of knowledge are necessary, according to Kaiser-Cooke (1993:219): (a) Comparative/contrastive knowledge of the two concept systems concerned (rather than **parallel** knowledge, as in the non-translating bilingual), (b) Cultural knowledge in the widest sense of the term including, essentially, knowledge of **cognitive norms**, and (c) translatorial expertise or the accumulation of a sufficient quantity of knowledge of **translation problem** types to make the qualitative leap towards abstraction and extrapolation from the **problem prototype** towards new problem settings. It is increasingly recognized that translation is between two cultures, and the literalism of Syriac translators was due to their isolation from Arabic culture. Their translations were not acceptable and had to be edited to bring them into line with the Arabic language system.

12 - In conclusion, it could be said that, within the United Nations System, translators are the main terminology producer, notably in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish. They are faced with **neology** as a

major problem. As specialized terms and phrases are the principal components of UN documents, terminology and phraseology occupy a privileged position in the UN translation activity, and authority, intertextuality standardization and acceptability are of vital importance. It is therefore highly recommended to include a bilingual glossary of new terms (in the source language and the target language) in each document. This will help record problematic terminology, for future use and for standardization purposes, pave the way for future bulletins and engage in a fruitful dialogue with the end-user.

Discussion

Comment. A crucial statement was made, namely that the translators should be at the **forefront** of the battle, developing as well their own languages and defending and standardizing them. They should be born **terminologists**. It is up to them to come up with relevance equivalents whenever terms are coined in other languages, which should be both **acceptable** and should be widespread afterwards. A deep knowledge of the **derivational possibilities** of languages is essential. A language should be developed according to its own rules and the possibilities it offers should be exploited. Sometimes translators don't dare create neologisms.

Comment. One group has perhaps been overlooked today, although Mr. Galinski hinted at this it, namely the **editors**. English translators are not actively involved in **coining terminology**, but a useful role for the editors in the existing setup in the United Nations, is to **validate terminology**, to help in the **standardization** process. There is hardly any hope of getting in touch with the **authors**, who may come from different parts of the world or even may not be UN staff, to use **standardized terminology**. It seems that when documents go through editing before

translating them, the editors would have a **very valuable role** to play in helping the translators in the five other languages to know that there is a certain level of standardization in the terminology used in the documents they are dealing with.

Comment. This is much in line with what is now carried out in industry, where texts are produced with **translators in mind.** That is **localization.** It might be more difficult within the UN framework, where ambiguity is deliberate in some texts. Basically it is a valuable approach.

Comment. Generally speaking, within the United Nations, **editors** are **terminology users,** not **terminology producers.** The emphases was put on translators, because they are *de facto* terminologists in this **multilingual environment.** Of course, editors in different languages have a role in terminology. This leads to another problem, i.e the **acceptability** and **authority.** The post of terminologist is more vital and important for terminological reasons than that of editor. Some years ago, and because of the authority controversy, it was proposed to **classify the** post of terminologist at least at **the P.5 level.** The problem which is raised is who is to give the green light for the **acceptability** of a term. The dicision is now normally taken at the section or service chief's level. The activity of editors is prominent, but they are **mostly end-users.**

Question. A theoretical question on the subject of **neology.** In the event that the Arabic Translation Service at UN Headquarters in New York were to translate a **neologism** in one way, different from that of the Academy of Arabic Language in Cairo or Damascus, which translation would be considered **authoritative**?

Answer. For the sake of **standardization**, the solution given by the **Academy of the Arabic Language** should

normally be adopted. However, **UN translators** are really **privileged**, because first of all the UN system is a kind of workshop, with **different contexts**, in **periodical documents** for **recurrent meetings**. The **correctness** of a term can be **checked**. This may take a long time to materiolize and it offers the possibility of constant **reviewing, evaluating** and revising. Translators have the opportunity to comprehend different shades of meaning, and therefore to reduce the **margin of polysemy**. UN documents, as a "**grey literature**" should be studied, In conjunction with a 1990 session of the *Haut Conseil de la Francophoni*, it was recommended to utilize UN documents for French terminology purposes. A similar recommendation emanated from the International Conference on Cooperation in Terminology in Tunis, in 1986, regarding Arabic.

Question. One problem is the discrepancy between New York and Vienna, at least in Arabic translation. One example is the Arabic equivalent of the Commission on the Status of Women. What can be said about that?

Answer. Documents of the Commission were translated in Vienna. Moreover, it should be mentioned that there is **standardization** and **harmonization** to a great extent, with a few exceptions, one of them relates to the name of the Commission. The term used in Vienna was chosen to avoid **polysemic problems** engendering **ambiguity**. A clearer and more concise term is better.

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