A Terminological Approach to Dictionary Entries. A Case Study

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Abstract

Debates over the status of terminology as an independent discipline different from lexicography have given rise to ardent controversies as regards the status of term vis-à-vis word. The present paper aims at reconciling the two parts by suggesting a practical approach to the lexical entry for core in a bilingual specialized dictionary. It also hints at analyzing the degrees of technicality of the corresponding translational equivalents and the implications for the target users’ professional needs.

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1. Introduction

Fascination with words has been a constant of all humans along the centuries. Used in every possible way, both uttered or written, words help us in getting acquainted with the mechanisms of universal communication at all levels. This idea of plenitude has been supported in depth by the plethora of meaning that words can bear and by our eagerness to unfold “the fabric we use to dress our thoughts” [1]. The present paper focuses on the fuzzy boundary between word and term, lexicography and terminology by analyzing the lexical entry for core in the English - Romanian Dictionary for Mechanical Engineering (ERDFME) [2]. My interest in the topic started with the translation of documentation in the domains of science and technology and the co-authorship of a bilingual specialized dictionary in the field of mechanical engineering and metallurgy [3].

Lexicography is one of the most dynamic branch of applied linguistics which has busied itself with the compilation of dictionaries in order to facilitate people’s understanding of the meaning of words. Unanimously

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acknowledged as reference works, dictionaries are useful tools for both the reception and production of texts in service of clearly defined practicalities: “It is without question that all types of dictionaries have their definite role in the verbal marketplace, since selection is guided by usefulness” [4].

Bilingual specialized dictionaries are, in my opinion, the final products of lexicographic research in technicality in the sense of Martin: “Through technicality a discipline establishes the inventory of what it can talk about, and the terms in which it can talk about them. That is, the function is ‘field creating’” [5]. Furthermore, they are not only mere repositories of words, but an ordered assembly of micro-monographies structured along the dimensions of hierarchy and classification where words become terms moving from the general to the specialized lexicon. This shift has occurred naturally with the evolution of human activities: “As the society or the individual becomes exposed to increasing amounts of information, and as these phenomena are mastered, so the potential images which an individual can express proliferate, and the nature of the language and the structures by which thought is realized undergo a metamorphosis” [6].

Common words have the function of describing and facilitating knowledge, terms reclassify it in “a move from the everyday to the technical” [7]. In my approach I do not make a clear-cut distinction between word and term, but I interchange them resorting to theories [8] about words and terms whose specific meaning is provided by context and the specialization of semantic features. I thus consider that the main objective of the paper is to illustrate the way in which specialized meaning is built around the bilingual lexical entry due to diverse polysemy processes such as interdomain polysemy, intradomain polysemy and terminologization.

2. Previous research in the domain of specialized discourse/lexicography

The theoretical research that I have previously undertaken in specialized lexicography focussed on subjects related to:

a. The contribution that bilingual specialized dictionaries bring to the translation of specialized texts in order to fulfil the users’ both linguistic and professional needs [9]. The article emphasized the importance of the lexicographer’s decision to compile the dictionary as an aid to finding the best translational equivalent in text reception and production from the native/a foreign language into a foreign /native language. Illustrations were provided by analysing several terms from the ERDFME.

b. The concept of Englishness discussed in connection with the characteristics of ESP written register [10]. In the analysis of some selected scientific and technical corpora I identified and interpreted the occurrence of linguistic phenomena such as:

- Syntactic density [11] given by the use of -ing forms (participles and gerunds) with a view to facilitate the objective description of the scientific and technical processes and phenomena through conciseness and precision. The functional meanings that they carry generally build on the semantic dimensions of qualification and activity.

- Lexical density given by the frequent occurrence of nominalised structures mapped on Classifier ^ Thing compounds [12] which provided a higher degree of contextual specialization and technicalization to the terms analysed with the further aim of “naming new objects and phenomena more precisely”, and “mainly used to refer to something which is conceived as a single entity, as an item in a class of its own”[13].

b. The use of lexicographic sources in teaching ESP/EST vocabulary [14]. Emphasis was laid on describing the gradient of specialized words from the perspective of meaning understanding by students from vocational schools.

3. Present research in the domain of bilingual specialized lexicography

3.1. Aims and objectives

The present research aims at illustrating the contribution of bilingual specialized lexicography to improving the target users’ choice of the right word by understanding how lexical relations interplay within the dictionary
entry, helping the user find the most appropriate translational equivalent: “In bilingual entries, your objective is to give users a clear idea of the safest direct translation of the headword, of where the boundaries of that translation lie, and other TL expressions that could come in handy in translating the headword or expressing the concept underlying it” [15]. We shall therefore take into account the nature of the translational equivalents and their degree of technicality, by analyzing under the heading of polysemy, the amount of information, the type of facts, the wording of definitions and the way in which awareness of the users’ needs is reflected in the lexical entry for core in ERDFME (see Figure 1 below).

core (el) miez (magnetic/de ferită, din tole) / al bobinei,
tor, miez toroidal /de cablu; (fiz) miez de reactor
(zona activă); (met) miez de turnare; (TH) con,
miez, umflătură, protuberanță, nod, sâmbure,
nucleu; înimă; (met) electrod (de sudare) (partea
din mijloc la cei înveliți); (c) memoria centrală/
principală a unui computer; (alim) miez de fruct, a
scoate miezul (unui fruct); esență

ERDFME 2009: 222

Fig.1 Dictionary entry for core

3.2. Degrees of technicality

My practical experience in compiling bilingual specialized dictionaries had its theoretical basis in the Functional Theory of Lexicography issued by Bergenholtz & Tarp [16] which erases the borderline between lexicography and terminology and turns it into an active area where language is subject to extralexicographical social situations and specialized dictionaries can satisfy the needs of a specific type of user with specific types of problems resulted from social practice. We can accordingly find terms or lexical units belonging to a specialized domain in general language dictionaries [17] or lexical units from the general lexicon in specialized dictionaries.

The lexical entry for core in ERDFME enters the latter direction, the technical meanings revealed by the Romanian translational equivalents are built on the semantic dimension of centrality/coreness, the same as the meaning of the common word core / miez in English and Romanian, as registered in [18] and [19]:

\[
\text{e.g. core: I: a central and often foundational part usually distinct from the enveloping part by a difference in nature (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)}
\]
\[
\text{miez: III: Partea cea mai dinăuntru, centrală a unui obiect, a unui spațiu etc; interior, nucleus (DEXI)}
\]

The two directions of movement from general/specialized to specialized/general lexicon have been studied by several scholars, for instance Robinson [20], Cabrè [21], Fuertes-Olivera [22] among others, who have provided a subcategorization model of the lexical units which can be found in any given specialized domain. The groups mentioned are: technical terms, semi-technical terms and general vocabulary words frequently used in the respective field.
3.2.1. Technical terms

Technical terms are specific to ‘hard’ domains (engineering, chemistry, mathematics, physics, computer science etc), being known only by a restricted community and are found at the literate pole of the cline of register, accounting for non-core words at the level of the lexicon: “technicality functions as a field-creating process, allowing the setting up and taxonomizing of areas of human interest” [23]. Technical terms are characterized by univocity and accuracy, the “words denoting the same object form an exact match of semantic content, being perfect bilingual partners in SL and TL” [24]. They are exemplars of total equivalence in translation and make all the difference for bilingual specialized dictionaries.

3.2.2. Semi-technical terms

Semi-technical terms come from general language but have acquired different meanings when used within a specific field, “the core of shared semantic ingredients is retained, the range of different meanings all meet at the base” [25]. As a result they are subject to polysemyzation due to the extension of meaning through analogy. They are found at the limit between technical terms and general vocabulary and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish them from the latter. They occupy somewhat the middle of the cline of technicality and their appurtenance to a semantic field specified in the bilingual specialized dictionary entry can help the user identify the most accurate equivalent in the TL.

3.2.3. General vocabulary terms

This group of terms are in fact general words which are used in a specialized context, without losing their original meaning, since “the central core of meaning is an aid to storage and a jog to memory” [26]. When the Ideational metafunction of language is taken into account, then registers focus on field including the language of science and professional jargons [27]. Both general and specialized dictionaries, monolingual and bilingual, may contain this type of terms as “Words are plentiful enough to supply all needs, suasive and other” [28].

3.3. On the polysemy of ‘core’ in ERDFME

In what follows we shall focus on the analysis of the lexical entry of core in ERDFME starting from the premise that “Bilingual specialized dictionaries (my adaptation) are provided with the language communication function and the knowledge dissemination function. They should provide the communicative information for their definienda and the knowledge information for their referents by means of definition or translation, which involves the relationships among the lexical item, referents and referential content” [29].

In connection with core, I have noticed that all the Romanian translational equivalents contain in their semantic matrix a number of associated components which are responsible for the manifestation of both polysemy, external /interdomain and internal/intradomain, and contextual synonymy: “Dictionary senses in a bilingual are not really senses of the headword at all, but simply the most user-friendly way to structure the material. Bilingual dictionary senses are predicated more on the TL than on the actual meanings of the SL headword” [30].

Interdomain polysemy with core is twofold and is explicitly suggested by the domain label indicators “[...] the label functions as a sense indicator for the benefit of the TL user when the direct translation is polysemous” [31]. Accordingly, the first meaning of core in Romanian is miez “the term is conceived as a meaning acquired by a lexical unit in a context of specialized communication” [32]. Domain interchange is the result of post modification with “the word’s branching out in several directions from a central core” [33] and specialization: (el) miez (magnetic/de ferită, din tole) / al bobinei, tor, miez toroidal /de cablu; (fiz) miez de reactor; (met) miez de turnare; (TH) con, miez, umflătură, protuberanță, nod, sămbure, nucleu; inimă; (alim)
Based on observation and practice, my opinion is that the target users would understand the analogy easier starting from the most frequent meaning of the word *core/miez*, in English and Romanian, that of *inedible central part of some fruit*. The second meaning is *memoria centrală/principală a unui computer* / *the internal memory of a computer* in computer science (c). At this point I can conclude that the concept of *coreness/centrality* encoded in the Romanian translational equivalents is not fundamentally different from the basic sense of *core*, but it implies the users’ specific goals, training and techniques in their working activities.

Intradomain polysemy with *core* in ERDFME occurs under the labels of technology (TH) and metallurgy (met) with eight, respectively two senses. Under (TH) we find the following Romanian translational equivalents *con, miez, umflătură, protuberanță, nod, sâmbure, nucleu; inimă*, and under (met) *miez de turnare* and *electrod* (de sudare) (partea din mijloc la cei înveliți). With the exception of *con, umflătură, protuberanță, nod* which refer to some physical characteristic distinguished for the objects under investigation, the translational equivalents, *sâmbure, nucleu; inimă* complete the series of contextual synonyms starting with *miez*. With reference to establishing a typology of terms in point of technicality I can state that all three groups are present in the lexical entry of *core*: *tor, con, protuberanță, nucleu, electrod, memoria centrală /principală a unui computer* are clearly technical terms of an interdisciplinary nature; *miez, sâmbure, inimă, umflătură* can be both semi-technical terms and general vocabulary representatives since they can occur in other specialized domains, for instance medicine and biology, and in general language with no registerial formality.

In analyzing the way in which the specialized meanings of the Romanian equivalents of *core* are built in ERDFME, my own stand has been similar to considering that “a bilingual dictionary is supposed to be a translation dictionary, regardless its extension. The translation in such a dictionary must not be a description (explanation) but a real translation which,[…],would fit directly in a correctly translated sentence in the corresponding language” [34]. In designing the entries the authors of bilingual specialized dictionaries should keep in mind the principle of distilling and condensing the information so as to meet the target users’ needs.

4. Conclusions

The approach presented in this paper has tackled problems concerning the nature of the information contained in the entry for *core* in ERDFME with a view to show that the move from the general to the specialized lexicon depends on the requirements of social practice, the dictionary itself having been compiled as a useful working tool for the comprehension of texts in English technical literature and their translation into Romanian by both specialists in the field of mechanical engineering and translators. The analysis in terms of polysemy and technicality has revealed the hierarchical structure of the entry and its solid linguistic basis where *word* and *term* serve the same purpose, that of facilitating communication of knowledge through translation.

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