# TOWARDS CONTRASTIVE STUDY
# OF NATIONAL TERMINOLOGIES

NATALIA GVISHIANI

*University of Moscow*

Terminology begins with concepts, the most general notions and categories of a given science (cf. Akhmanova 1985). Terminological systems are therefore usable as knowledge banks which can serve as the basis for knowledge acquisition within the framework of respective subject fields (Budin et al. 1988).

Doing terminology we concern ourselves with different fields of human knowledge. We speak of terms as 'verbalized concepts'. No rational study of terminology can be made possible unless the latter has been systematized and standardized. This cannot be achieved without reference to the content-plane of terms, which is particularly true of subject fields within the domain of the humanities. The difference between the 'sciences' and the 'arts' consists in the amount of methodological background every one of these divisions presupposes. As far as the Humanities are concerned, the proliferation of drastically different methodological principles has brought about serious difficulties in establishing contact and understanding between adherents of different schools of thought.

The difficulties one is confronted with when approaching the problem of translation of terms are stupendous. Not infrequently it transpires that formal word-by-word translation gets us nowhere since there exist different frames-of-reference. Only by carring out an overall contrastive analysis of the terminological systems in question can we arrive at a way of expressing a given metalinguistic content in the target language. The same applies to one's native terminology: it takes the knowledge of the system as a whole to be able to find a reliable notional equivalent of a foreign term.

Contrastive analysis of national terminologies is based on the priority of the content plane. We cannot confine ourselves to just names without taking note of the subject itself – its basic concepts and notions. This interest in the 'facts' and 'ideas' urges us to undertake the cognitive approach with its emphasis on encyclopeadic knowledge.

We begin with 'the thing', 'the concept' because we believe that by identifying

the concept itself (the subject-matter) we can solve at least part of the problem: to offer the learner a clear definition of what is being talked about, i.e. the notion under consideration.

Another problem is how we talk about this notion. There can be more than one term for a single concept. Contrastive analysis across metadialects has enabled us to get an idea of how writers use terms and how they think of their own subject.

Stage 1 in the contrastive analysis of terminologies is the identification of concepts based on the priority of the content plane. Concepts come into being only when certain words are firmly attached to them by means of exact scientific definitions. It follows that at this stage the method of definitional verification comes to the fore.

We proceed from phenomena, concepts and ideas, our approach thus being the onomasiological rather than semasiological one. The whole thing is based on the equality of the referent – the primary object, concept or idea. In this way we may arrive at a systematic description of terminology including a variety of names (metadialectal variants) referring to one and the same concept.

This is a preliminary stage in our contrastive analysis which reveals quite a few instances of one term being used for a number of concepts and a number of terms referring to one and the same concept. The onomasiological logic suggests that first an inventory of concepts should be set up from which we pass on to avoid the shortcomings of rigorous standardizing tendencies and develop awareness of the established "legislate" terminological usage as well as of the new vocabulary items which have been introduced in the most important publications in the field or in specialized dictionaries. It follows that our purpose at this preliminary stage is to arrive at a system of concepts – i.e. a taxonomy – by means of close contrastive analysis of the carefully chosen reference works.

Thus, for instance, "the basic divisions into which all the words of a language fall" are commonly referred to as 'parts of speech'. The term 'parts of speech' is "the continuation of a Latin phrase 'pars orationis' (itself a calque or loan translation from the Greek) which might perhaps be more aptly rendered as 'part of the utterance' or 'element of the sentence'" (Matthews 1979:59).

As soon as we have identified the concept of the main lexical-grammatical classes of words we can go further and consider the different names used to refer to it (stage 2). Besides 'parts of speech' there are other terms. As David Crystal points out, 'parts of speech' is now regarded by many linguists as a traditional term which goes back to ancient Greek and Roman grammarians. Now "linguists tend to prefer such terms as 'Word-class' or 'Form-class', where the grouping is based on formal criteria of a more universally applicable kind" (Crystal 1985:222).

| The main lexical-grammatical classes of words: | Parts of Speech |
|---|---|
| Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Conjunction, | 1) Word Classes/Form Classes (D. Crystal. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*) |

| Interjection | 2) Grammatical Categories (American Descriptive Linguistics) 3) Grammatical Features (Dwight Bolinger) |
|---|---|

The term 'grammatical features' has received the following explanation. According to Bolinger, "The recent shift by which such things as Noun, Verb, Transitive, Animate, etc. are considered to be grammatical features rather than grammatical categories confers a gain in flexibility and economy. Instead of viewing words as members of classes, with resulting complications when classes intersect, the class itself becomes a mark of the word" (Bolinger 1969:40).

Other cases when the same idea or the same content is found to be expressed by different metalinguistic means are the following. What Smirnitsky (1959) calls 'full, lexical verbs' as distinct from 'auxiliary verbs' is denoted by Palmer (1969) as 'principle, specific verbs' which are opposed to 'conjugating verbs or conjugators'. 'Interrogative pronouns' are referred to in Crystal's (1985) dictionary as 'wh-pronouns'. Quirk's (1985) name for 'dissafixation' (the process by which the shorter word is created by deletion of a supposed affix) is 'backformation'.

In the authentic English metalanguage it is preferable to use a more traditional term 'genetive' and not 'possessive' (case). What in Russian is denoted by the term 'polifunktsional'nost" ('polyfunctionality') is referred to in English by a number of names depending on the particular author's frame of reference:

| Polyfunctionality | 1) 'partial conversion' (D. Crystal) 2) 'functional shift' (R. Quirk) 3) 'syntactic derivation' (J. Kuryłowicz) |
|---|---|

As can be seen from the above discussion translation of terms presents a complicated problem. Very often people rely on words (terms) without trying to look deeply into the ontology of respective concepts.

For example, a geographical term 'moor' often figures in literary descriptions of nature and this is not surprising since nearly 1/3 of the territory of Great Britain is covered by moors or moorland. It is interesting to point out that the English 'moor' is rather commonly translated into Russian as 'boloto' ('marsh' or 'bog') which does not correspond to the nature of the phenomenon denoted by the word 'moor'. English landscape differs greatly from the Russian one: unless we consider the physical geographical properties of the British type of landscape we are bound to remain within the confines of Russian geographical thinking. In actual fact 'moor' is an upland area of open country which has nothing in common with 'a bog' (the Russian 'boloto') (cf. Komarova 1988).

Lack of information on the ontological level may lead to misinterpretiation of the whole of a speech event.

Another example. The title of Seton Thompson's story "Little War Horse. The History of Jack-Rabbit" was translated into Russian as "Jack, Boevoj Konek (War Horse). Istoria Krolika (The History of a Rabbit)".

However according to Edwin Steen's *Dictionary of Biology* 'a jack-rabbit' is "one of the several large american hares with long ears and long hind legs".

*American Wild Life Illustrated* offers more specified information on the subject: "Matching their greatly elongated hind legs and paws are their ears capable of very keen hearing. It was these long ears that originally suggested the name of jackass rabbits more than fifty years ago, although they are not really rabbits at all".

It seems hardly possible to translate 'Jack' in 'Jack-rabbit' as a name of the character. The discrepancy between the English word and its Russian translation is made obvious the moment we turn to the scientific description of jack-rabbits in *American Wild Life* which corresponds in minute detail to the description of the fictitious 'War Horse' in Seton Thompson's story (cf. Nikitina 1989).

Finding terminological equivalents or analogs across different languages presupposes one's awareness of peculiarities of terminological systems as based on different national languages as well as of a host of various directions, theories and schools of thought which have been described as metadialects.

To achieve better understanding of the content-plane of terms translation – an exercise in meaning equivalence across languages – should be coupled with confrontation – an exercise in meaning equivalence across frames of reference (Akhmanova 1977). Both approaches are to be applied simultaneously to ensure the most reliable results in the course of contrastive studies of terminologies. Not only frames-of-reference reflect the peculiarities of the given national expression, but they also mirror the development of theoretical thought, the process of accumulation of knowledge.

Individual frames of reference (metadialects) are structured differently with regard to the hierarchies of terms which constitute them. For example, if we compare A.I. Smirnitsky's metalanguage with the well-known metalinguistic system proposed by Martin Joos, we find that what Smirnitsky calls 'a morphological grammatical category', Joos refers to as 'dimensions of categorization', reserving the name 'category' for what Smirnitsky calls 'categorial form'. If according to Smirnitsky we speak of the morphological grammatical categories of tense, aspect and taxis, then according to Joos tense, aspect and taxis are 'dimensions of categorization'. We might add that Joos appears to apprehend these relationships in what might be described as a 'spatial' form. Otherwise stated, categories are established in a manner which proceeds according to certain 'dimensions of categorization', while, for instance, the opposition of perfective and non-perfective will be described not as the respective categorial forms, but as 'categories' (cf. Akhmanova and Belenkaya 1975).

As can be easily seen, metalinguistic divergences in linguistic terminology are due to the clear-cut division into linguistic schools. This is probably the reason why linguists draw our attention to terminology as "another area where there are conflicting needs": "one grammarian's terminology is another's gobbledygook" (Chalker 1984:83).

No rational metalanguage is ever uniform even within the bounds of a given national usage. The lexicographer then has a choice of either registing the synonymously related expressions (metadialectal variants) providing them with proper references or if his task is a systematic description of a given terminology – bringing them together under one descriptor.

Descriptor is a term which has been chosen as best-qualified to stand for a series of words which somehow bear on the same idea, the same scientific concept. Translation alone proves to be of no help in some cases since formal language coincidence does not make our understanding easier, on the contrary it sometimes aggravates the situation by bringing us face to face with the so-called "false friends of the interpreter".

A Russian-English dictionary of linguistic terms will have different descriptors registered for the source and the target languages in cases like slovo (word)/ lexeme; morfologija (morphology)/accidence; tsasti retsi (parts of speech)/form-classes – the first part of each dichotomy being characteristic of the Russian terminological tradition, while the second – of the English one. If properly looked into national terminologies can tell us a lot about how the given names came to be generally recognized as terms of this particular branch of knowledge.

Descriptors are often chosen with reference to the etymological type of terms. Another question for the translator to decide is whether the international variant should always be preferred to the nationally based one.

In English philology we have a choice between native words of anglo-saxon origin and borrowed ones – i.e. derived from Greek-Latin-Roman roots, for example:

| Native terms | Borrowed terms |
| --- | --- |
| stop | occlusion |
| linking | liaison |
| stress | accent |
| loose | lax |
| foregrounding | actualization |
| speech | discourse |
| answer | reply |
| shortening | abridgement |
| set | idiomatic |
| voicing | sonorization |

The investigation has shown that in spite of the Plain English Compaign preference is most often given to borrowed terms which are regularly chosen to serve as descriptors.

It follows that the above contrastive analysis combines the 'standardizing' and 'descriptive' tendencies. On the one hand we proceed from descriptor-terms, which taken together form a well-defined system as reflected in terminological dictionaries. On the other hand – we seek to present a number of different approaches so that we could get a broader view of the subject as well as develop awareness

of varying terminologies as reflecting the difference between respective schools of thought.

## REFERENCES

Akhmanova, O.S. 1977. *Linguistic terminology*. Moscow: MGU Press.

Akhmanova, O.S. 1985. "Terminology and terminologies". *Terminology and related fields*. In Wüster, E. (ed.). 1985. 86-91.

Akhmanova, O.S. and Belenkaya, V.D. 1975. *The morphology of the English verb*. Moscow: MGU Press.

Bolinger, D. 1969. "Categories, features, attributes". *Brno Studies in English* 8. 40-42.

Budin, G. et al. 1988. *Terminology teaching and training*. Wien: Infoterm.

Chalker, S. 1984. "Why can't someone write a nice, simple grammar?" *ELT Journal* 38/2. 83-85.

Crystal, D. 1985. *A dictionary of phonetics and linguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Komarova, A.I. 1988. *The philology of English landscape*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Moscow.

Matthews, P.H. 1979. *Morphology. An introduction to the theory of word-structure*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Nikitina, J.A. 1989. "The interaction of terms and words of the general language with special reference to names of animals". Unpublished paper, University of Moscow.

Palmer, H. 1969. *A grammar of spoken English*. Cambridge: Hefter.

Quirk, R. et al. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.

Smirnitsky, A.I. 1959. *A course in Modern English morphology*. Moscow: MGU Press.

Wüster, E. (ed.). 1985. *Terminology and related fields*. Wien: Springer-Verlag.