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Going European: a Swedish terminological project in questions and answers

Abstract

This paper presents a special type of a terminological project, involving the addition of term equivalents to Eurodicautom, the multilingual terminological database of the Commission of the European Communities. The project team faced a number of challenges, of which the most essential were the need to find or create a large number of Swedish terms in a short time and to adjust the routines and practices developed for more traditional terminological projects to the requirements of translation-oriented terminology work. Various kinds of terminological problems encountered are discussed ranging from discrepancies between the definitions of the same concept in different languages to finding an equivalent for a culture-dependent concept. The principles and methods used for dealing with some of the challenging cases are also considered.

Keywords: translation-oriented terminology work, term equivalent, concept correspondence, challenging cases

1. What's it all about?

In the project described here, the insights and experience acquired from traditional terminological projects are applied to translation-oriented multilingual terminology work. The project (or rather a series of projects carried out from 1995-1997) involved introducing Swedish terminology into Eurodicautom, the multilingual terminological database of the Commission of the European Communities. The projects were undertaken by the Swedish Centre for Technical Terminology (TNC) and were carried out by the TNC terminologists in cooperation with a large number of Swedish subject area specialists.

2. What's the point of reporting on yet another project?

No two terminological projects are ever exactly alike. No matter how strictly two project teams follow common principles or use the same techniques, the solutions found, the way in which the work was organized and the terminological data collected and presented, etc., will never be identical. For this reason, a summary of the experience gained from the project described below may lead to a better understanding of the nature of terminology work and contribute to the further development of its theoretical and practical foundation.

3. What's so special about this project?

This project differs in many respects from more traditional terminological pursuits. If we describe a traditional terminological project, e.g. compilation of terminological vocabularies, in terms of its main features, we will find the following:

Scope:	terminology of one or several related subject areas (mainly science and technology)
Size :	one to five thousand entries
Time limits:	one to several years
Objective:	harmonization of terminology within one or several related subject areas
Project team:	a small team including several subject specialists and terminologists working together in close cooperation
Intended primarily for:	subject specialists
Types of terminology work involved:	selection of concepts, construction of concept systems, writing of definitions, finding term equivalents in other languages
The attitude towards usage:	prescriptive

If we use the same parameters to describe a typical TNC's Eurodicautom project we will get the following values:

Scope:	terminology of a vast number of (unrelated) subject areas ranging from law to agriculture to plasma physics
Size:	30-50 000 entries
Objective:	providing Swedish term equivalents for the concepts already selected
Time limits:	approximately one year
Intended primarily for:	translators
Types of terminology work involved:	finding term equivalents for the concepts described in other languages
The attitude towards usage:	descriptive

A comparison of the two lists shows clearly that there are more differences than similarities between a traditional terminological vocabulary project and the Eurodicautom project. TNC discovered at a very early stage that successful fulfilment of the project would require creating a number of new routines and practices as well as adjusting the existing ones to the needs of the translation-oriented terminology work.

4. Who did what in the Eurodicautom projects?

The size, scope, time constraints, etc. of a Eurodicautom project also required a different type of project team. Instead of a traditional working group consisting of several subject specialists and one or two terminologists, a large subject specialist "pool" was created, in which each of the specialists worked independently with the terminology in his/her subject area and had direct contact with one of the terminologists at TNC.

The terminologist's job was to:
- prepare the source material and distribute it to specialists in the respective subject areas;
- render terminological advice and assistance to subject specialists;
- carry out terminological and linguistic control of the material submitted by subject specialists.

Subject specialists were to:
- identify the concepts described in the Eurodicautom entries (source entries);
- find or create Swedish term equivalents provided if possible with the definitions;
- record the information on Swedish terms and concepts in the Eurodicautom entry format.

An example of a Eurodicautom entry as submitted by a subject specialist is given in the Annex.

5. What terminological skills did subject specialists need to do the job?

In theory subject specialists needed to be acquainted with:
- theoretical foundations of terminology work (the central role of the concept in terminology work, the term – concept relations, types of terms, etc.)
- techniques and methods involved in adding term equivalents to Eurodicautom, of which the following were of primary importance:
    - how to analyze the information contained in an entry
    - where to look for term equivalents
    - what requirements a term equivalent should satisfy
    - what minimum requirements a definition of a concept should fulfill
    - what additional information on the concept or term should be supplied, e.g. on the degree of concept correspondence, term usage
    - how to evaluate the sources of terminological data
    - how to describe bibliographical references
    - how to record the information in the Eurodicautom format.

To help subject specialists become acquainted with these issues, the TNC terminologists prepared a manual which included a short introduction into general principles of terminology work and a detailed description of the techniques and methods required for finding and recording terminological data. A large part of this manual was devoted to the description of challenging cases and recommendations on how these were to be coped with.

6. What is a challenging case in a multilingual terminological project?

Let us first consider the opposite of a challenging case – a model case. In a model case:
- the concept described in an entry can be identified on the basis of information contained in the entry (a clearly formulated definition of the concept in one of the source languages usually sufficed)
- terms and definitions in different source languages refer to the same concept
- there is a Swedish term equivalent which adequately covers the concept described in the source languages
- a Swedish term equivalent satisfies the following terminological requirements: it is transparent, it is unequivocal, it is monosemous and it originates from a reliable source.

A challenging case is any case which does not fulfill at least one of the above conditions. If one stretches the point a little further, whole subject areas can be regarded as challenging cases. Consider, for example:

- rapidly developing subject areas, e.g. information retrieval where many of the terms and concepts have become obsolete due to the time gap (sometimes exceeding 20 years) between the creation of certain Eurodicautom entries and the introduction of Swedish term equivalents
- culture-dependent subject areas, e.g. law, administration, where wide discrepancies between the concepts developed in different countries are common
- the scarcity or absence of Swedish terms in some of the subject areas. Consider, for example, grape wine cultivation which is quite alien to Sweden's cool climate
- the dominance of other languages in the first place English in some of the subject areas, e.g. in plasma physics or telecommunications.

7. Which were the most common challenging cases?

The list below contains some of the most typical challenging cases:

- A concept that is difficult to identify
  This may be due to the absence or deficiency of definitions or to discrepancies between the definitions of the same concept in different source languages.
- An entry contains definitions in different source languages which do not refer to the same concept
- There is no corresponding concept in Swedish
  This may be due to the absence of a corresponding subject area in Sweden or to the absence of this particular concept in an existing subject area.
- There is only a partial correspondence between a concept in the source languages and the one covered by a Swedish term equivalent
- There exists no Swedish term equivalent which covers the concept in an entry.

8. How were the challenging cases dealt with?

The subject specialists were advised to adhere to the following guiding principle when they faced a challenging case: do what you can to find or create a Swedish term equivalent and account for what you did and what you cannot do. This may sound fairly conventional but in fact a lot of valuable terminological information was collected as a result of the application of this principle, and this information will be of interest both for the users and developers of Eurodicautom.

A great effort went into teaching the specialists to record the information in the proper fields of the Eurodicautom entry format, as the current format allows information of many different types to be recorded in the same field. See, e.g. the description of the explanatory note field below.

The Swedish information was to be filled in the following Swedish fields of the entry format: the term field, the definition field, the reference field, the explanatory note field and the Eurodicautom comment field. The explanatory note was intended for Eurodicautom users while the Eurodicautom comment field was intended for the Eurodicautom developers. An internal TNC field was introduced to enhance communication between subject specialists and

the terminologists who carried out the terminological control of the entries processed by the specialists.

The content and type of information recorded in the Swedish fields could differ drastically between a model case and a challenging case. In a model case the term field contained a generally recognized Swedish term (and its possible synonyms), the definition field – the definition of the concept covered by this term, the reference field – the reference to a published source. The explanatory note might have contained the encyclopedic information complementing the definition of the concept or the grammatical information concerning the term. The Eurodicautom comment field was left blank, which was an indication of the subject specialist's conviction that the information in the source languages was correct and adequate.

In a challenging case, however, the fields looked quite different. The term field could either be left blank, which showed that no term equivalent was found or could be created by a subject specialist, or filled in with a term suggested by a specialist, see Example 1 below.

The definition field could either be left blank (no definition was found or suggested by a subject specialist) or filled with a short explanation of the concept described in the source languages (in case the term field was left blank), see Example 2.

The reference field could contain a specialist's name and affiliation to show that (s)he was the source of the information in the other Swedish fields.

The explanatory note field could contain the information on:
- the status of the term (if the term field is filled with a suggested term), see Example 1,
- the differences between the concept referred to by the Swedish term and the concept covered by the terms in the source languages, see Example 3,
- the content of the definition field (if it contained an explanation of the concept), see Example 2,
- the degree of correspondence between the concept covered by the Swedish term and the concepts covered by terms in different source languages, see Example 4,
- the absence of the corresponding concept, see Example 2.

The Eurodicautom comment field could contain the information on the deficiency or inconsistency of information in the source languages. Several standard introductory remarks were used to indicate the type of a problem encountered, e.g. "the concept is difficult to identify", "there is more than one concept in the entry".

Below are some examples of how the information on challenging cases was recorded.

Example 1. There is no Swedish term equivalent, a subject specialist creates a new term:

English term	snap-in closure;snap-off closure
Swedish term	förslutning med snäpplock
Reference	Cecilia Öhman, Koryfé AB
Explanatory note	termförslag (suggested term)

Example 2. There is no corresponding Swedish concept, a subject specialist gives a short explanation of the concept in Swedish:

German term	Naturalpacht
German definition	Vereinbarung des Pachtpreises nicht in Geld, sondern in Naturalien, die oft nur als Wertmass fuer Geldzahlung dienten
Swedish term	
Swedish definition	arrende där avgiften erläggs på annat sätt än med pengar (rent paid not with money)
Reference	Lars-Göran Svensson, LRF Arrendeservice
Explanatory note	begreppet är främmande för svenska förhållanden (the corresponding concept does not exist in Sweden); i definitionsfältet ges en förklaring (the definition field contains an explanation of the concept in Swedish)

Example 3. The concept covered by a Swedish term equivalent is partially equivalent to the one covered by the term in one of the source languages:

French term	carte de connexion
French definition	carte qui, insérée dans un micro-ordinateur, permet de se connecter à des réseaux
Swedish term	instickskort
Explanatory note	den svenska termen täcker ett vidare begrepp än det som den franska definitionen pekar på (the Swedish term covers a broader concept than the one described in the French definition.

Example 4. The Swedish term corresponds to a term in one of the source languages:

French term	germination sur aire
English term	germination
Swedish term	groning
Explanatory note	den svenska termen motsvarar närmast den engelska termen *germination* (the Swedish term corresponds to the English term *germination*)

9. What implications can Swedish Eurodicautom projects have on Swedish for special purposes?

From a language planning point of view it is difficult to estimate the ultimate impact of the Eurodicautom projects on Swedish for special purposes but the facts speak for themselves: more than 100 000 Swedish terms in a variety of subject areas have now made their appearance as equivalents to terms in other European languages; almost half of these have not been recorded in any published source before. One hopes that the completion of the Eurodicautom projects may give rise to further development of Swedish terminology especially in those subject areas which had but a limited number of terms in Swedish.

Language development follows its own path and not all of the new terms suggested will be widely used in respective subject areas. One should not forget, however, that all term equivalents introduced in the course of the projects were subjected to terminological and linguistic control which makes the new Swedish terminology not only a quantitative but also a qualitative phenomenon.

One last point: with Eurodicautom now open for access via Internet, Swedish terminology has got a much better chance of reaching its prospective users. Going European may thus be interpreted as coming Swedish.

Acknowledgements

10. References

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Annex

Example of a Eurodicautom term entry as submitted by a Swedish subject specialist

%%NI 0000361	Identifying number
%%CF 4	Reliability code
%%FG	Language code (French)
%%VE temporisation	Headword
%%DF realisation d'un evenement survenant a l'echeance d'un laps de temps determine decompte a partir d'un autre evenement defini	Definition
%%RF ISO/DIS 2382/IX	Reference
%%NT La temporisation peut etre bloquee par un signal approprie	Note
%%DG	Language code (German)
%%VE Zeitueberwachung	Headword
%%RF NTG 1203; Datex-P, 2, S 12	Reference
%%EN	Language code (English)
%%VE time out	Headword
%%DF An event that occurs at the end of a predetermined period of time that began at the occurrence of another specified event	Definition
%%RF ISO/DIS 2382/IX	Reference
%%NT The time out can be prevented by an appropriate signal	Note
%%SVENSKA FÄLT	Swedish fields
svTERM:　tidsutlösning	Swedish term equivalent
svDef:　händelse som inträffar efter bestämd tid som inleds när en annan bestämd händelse inträffar	Definition
svKälla:　SS 01 16 01. - 1989	Reference
svAnm:　Exempel: funktion som loggar ut en användare efter viss tid. Den svenska termen motsvarar den franska och engelska definitionen	Explanatory note
intAnm>EU:	Note intended for Eurodicautom terminologists
intAnm>TNC:	Note intended for TNC terminologists