Dealing with Ambiguity: An Analysis of Pym's Recommendations to Retrieve Ambiguities of Terms Related to Translation Studies

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Abstract

Recent times have seen a vast expansion in specialized translation degree programs. However, as any nascent discipline, several of its nomenclatures are still ambiguous or inaccurate, compromising understanding and applicability in the classroom. That being considered, this article aims to analyze, qualitatively, the recommendations provided by Prof. Anthony Pym in his "Tentative Glossary" of terms used by academics in Translation Studies classes. Such glossary includes 141 terms based on his doctoral students' doubts when dealing with Translation Terminology. The present paper analyzes 15 of those terms, which were selected randomly and divided into three categories (ambiguous, standard and abstentious) regarding (lack of) ambiguity aiming at simplification for teaching practices. Concluding, it is learned that contextualization can decrease misunderstandings; a further study in the light of Corpus Linguistics field in order to align possibilities is suggested.

Keywords: Translation Studies; Terminology; Ambiguity; Translation Terminology; Translation Glossary.

1. Introduction

The importance of translation has been widely recognized in the past years, and its study as an academic discipline has become crucial. Various theoretical concepts, methods, models, approaches, and procedures have been discussed to improve this field of study and to help students (future professionals) in this very stressful and demanding profession.

According to Munday (2012), throughout history, written and spoken translations have played a crucial role in interhuman communication, not least in providing access to important texts for scholarship and religious purposes. As world trade has grown, so has the importance of translation. (MUNDAY, 2012, p. 10)

As in any recent discipline, Translation Studies is not immune to the rise of new terms and concepts to fulfill the need for clarification. Such necessity gives Terminology, an intrinsically Translation related-area, its indispensable owed task of compiling, describing, processing and presenting the terms of any specific subject field. Both areas, working in concert, provide specialists, semi-specialists and laypeople with proper communication within their working contexts.

In addition, it is possible to observe an ever-growing number of students interested in translation and terminology studies at both undergraduate and graduate levels, as for these programs serve as highly valued entry-level qualifications for the professions. The competence of students in this area permeates a theoretical foundation whose terminology is presented with conceptual rigor, along with terminological uniformity.

This paper, then, aims to offer a qualitative analysis of the recommendations provided by Prof. Anthony Pym while compiling the terminology of the area of Translation in his "Tentative Glossary". The terms were based on the doubts arisen in discussions with students completing their doctoral research within the Intercultural Studies Group at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain.

We not only intend to alert academics and researchers to some of the ambiguities and vagaries of commonplace nomenclatures regarding the study of Translation Studies Terminology, but also to standardize terms, simplifying their (non-)use recognition.

Although this paper does not cover all aspects of term analysis, proposing more generalized and broader criteria for discussion, we do believe that terminological simplification in the field of Translation Studies is imperative, especially in academic or other educational contexts.

2. Methodology

We have based our methodology on Translation Studies and Terminology Theories, whose data collection and analysis took into consideration the following two steps:

A. Randomized selection of terms;
B. Analysis of recommendation regarding term ambiguity.

Among 141 terms and recommendations listed by the scholar, we selected, randomly, and analyzed the ambiguity of 15 terms and their equivalent recommendations according to the following criteria:

a. Term fits perfectly;
b. Term fits different meanings – depending on context;
c. Term has synonymous terms – depending on context, origin, and/or language of user;
d. Term has evolved into a more modern term;
e. Term is a misnomer – no longer used;
f. Term changes depending on collocations.

For some terms, we suggested abstinence mostly because indiscriminate use has bereft the word of immediate specificity, such as *Cultural Term,* since concerns with wider cultural issues can be found as far back as the Russian Formalists and the Prague School, there is little evidence of one unitary transformation having taken place at the time of the "cultural turn" promoted by Lefevere and Bassnett (1990). In other cases, we recommend a collocation usage in order to make oneself clear, as in *Equivalence – Equivalence-**Belief***.

A table containing meaning, Pym's usage recommendation, and our analysis of each of the fifteen entries is shown at the end of the present paper.

3. Discussion

We underline that this so called "lack of clearness" – the presence of ambiguity and vagaries in some meanings and usages of terms – derive from several cultural e contextual changes which have been occurring with the emerging of new concepts and new perspectives on the field (i.e.: technology evolution is one of the reasons why some terms are now obsolete.). Regarding to how context influences terms, Cabré (1998, p.39) says that: "Terms can be described in three ways: linguistically, cognitively, and with respect to communication". Communication depends on context, which is always changing; the matter is: to what extent can we standardize terms, even though they are related to a variety of contexts within the same field?

In a perfect scenario, terms would follow what Cabré (1998, p.40) mentions: "Theoretically, terms should be unambiguous and have one meaning and only one designation corresponding to one form."

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Even not reaching perfection, Terminology aims to facilitate the work of students and professionals.

4. Conclusion

We propose a further discussion on more generalized and broader criteria regarding term analysis since this paper does not cover all possible aspects. So far, we have concluded that contextualization can decrease misunderstandings and terminological simplification in the field of Translation Studies is imperative, especially in academic or other educational contexts.

We also agree that students and professionals of the Translation field would benefit from the preparation of a corpus related to Translation Studies Terminology based on Prof. Pym's "Tentative Glossary". A textual corpus may be the answer for reducing the inaccuracies and ambiguities found in the experimental glossary analyzed in the present article; corpus analysis tools can not only investigate the patterns of use but also their frequency and the contextual factors that affect term variability.

5. Tables

In this section, randomly selected verbs are listed and their recommendations analyzed.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
A language, B language vs. L1, L2	The terms "A language", "B language" and "C language" are traditionally used in translator training institutions, where they indicate the language that the trainee has nominated as their primary or strongest (A), then the languages in which they need most training (B and C). A complete bilingual might thus request "double A" status of some kind, and many learners will effectively have a B1 and a B2 (i.e. two "second" languages at about the same level). More or less the same meanings are used by interpreters when naming their working languages. On the other hand, the terms "L1", "L2", etc. are used in the study of language acquisition, sometimes to indicate the *order* in which languages are acquired, and more normally to separate the primary or "mother" tongue from the others. Although the two nomenclatures often overlap (the trainee's A language is usually their L1), there is a certain logic in separating the criteria of language acquisition from those of translator training.	Ambiguous	*"leave as is"*
Our analysis **Term fits different meanings – depending on context;** Pym presents different ways of expressing which languages are primary or stronger for someone (A). Then, those that require training (B/C); mention order languages are acquired (L1/ L2) or when dealing with translations (L1 – source/ L2 target). We believe this ambiguity cannot cause much of a problem, since A can refer to L1, based on the same premise: the first language / the mother language / the source language – contextualization plays an important role here.			

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Audiovisual translation	Translation that accompanies spoken language and visual communication, as in film, plays, opera, videogames, mobile telephony, computer games, indeed any electronic communication involving sound and images.	Standard + Ambiguous	Respect the term, but always with the awareness that the field is huge, subject to myriad constraints, and difficult to generalize about.

Our analysis
Term changes depending on collocations;
We believe this term should be accompanied by an extra information which would decipher the kind of audiovisual one is dealing with (bearing in mind that the field is huge).

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
CAT tools	The term "computer-aided translation" (or "computer-assisted translation") is now a misnomer, since computers are involved in almost all translation jobs, and in a lot of interpreting as well. The term should be replaced by clear reference to the technologies actually involved (e.g. translation memories, machine translation, terminology database).	Abstentious	Avoid

Our analysis
Term is a misnomer – no longer used;
Term has evolved into a more modern term;
We understand what Pym wanted to say by "misnomer": computers are involved in all translation jobs nowadays, so we believe this term has evolved into a more detailed term in which one is sure about what technology is being used.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Checking	Term used in European standard EN-15038 for changes made to the translation by the translator, as opposed to **revisions** (*q.v.*) and **reviews** (*q.v.*), which are carried out by people other than the translator (cf. **TEP**). This term does not seem to have gained standardized status in industry or research, and it has nothing within its semantics to suggest that only the translator can do this.	Ambiguous	Prefer "**self-revision**", at least for the purposes of research.

Our analysis
Term fits different meanings – depending on context;
When someone says they are "checking" something, it does not only mean they are making a revision or something like that. It is the kind of term that can refer to many things and in different fields – especially in common language. We believe it should not be part of Translation Terminology.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Chuchotage **vs. whisper interpreting**:	This is where the interpreter sits next to (or somehow behind) the person receiving the rendition, and speaks quietly so as not to disrupt the wider setting (e.g. a conference). Since "chuchoter" means "to whisper", and not much else, there is no possible justification for the French term, unless you want to attract Mortisha Adams.	Abstentious	**Whisper interpreting**, although "whispered interpreting" can also be found and does make sense.

Our analysis
Term has synonymous terms – depending on context, origin, and/or language of user;
Term has evolved into a more modern term;
There is no need for a French term when you have a term that means the same in the *Lingua Franca* of the field. Once again, we are aiming to simplify things!

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Competence	Currently popular term for the set of things that a professional knows (knowledge), is able to do (skills), and is able to do while adopting a certain relation to others (dispositions or attitudes). "Translator competence" would thus be the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become a translator. The concept can be reduced to just two components: declarative knowledge ("knowing that") and operational knowledge ("knowing how"). As such, the term "competence" has very little to do with the way the same term was used in (Chomsky's) linguistics to indicate a set of rules that underlie performance. A further problem is that most models of translator competence include numerous components (such as "knowledge of Language A", "knowledge of translation technologies", "ability to apply translation strategies", "confidence", "speed") without any assurance that the list is not open-ended or subject to radical historical change. There is no empirical evidence to indicate that the components are indeed separate, or that they are combined such that learning in one component entails progress in others.	Standard + Ambiguous	Avoid assumptions that translator competence is a recognized unified and stable object; prefer, wherever possible, more specific terms **skill**, **knowledge**, and **disposition**, with degrees of **expertise** operative within all three.

Our analysis
Term fits different meanings – depending on context;
Term changes depending on collocations;
Unless the word "competence" is accompanied by a collocation (i.e.: kind of competence), we believe it should not be part of Translation Terminology – for it can define lots of components.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Constrained translation	Term proposed by Mayoral et al. (1988) for the basic view that all translations are subject to a number of non-linguistic constraints, from temporal and spatial restrictions to the need to not contradict information conveyed by sound or image. Mayoral's is a very neat view that seems not to have had the repercussion it merits, especially in the field of audiovisual translation (*q.v.*). The basic terminological problem is that all translating is constrained in one way or another, so the term is not really saying much. The boundaries between the linguistic and the non-linguistic have also been blurred by work in the area of pragmatics.	Ambiguous	Talk freely about "**translation constraints**", whether they are linguistic or not, in full awareness that some constraints are always present.

Our analysis
Term changes depending on collocations;
We believe the term lacks what kind of constrain one is mentioning. Once it is understood, ambiguity is off the table.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Cultural translation	Term with many different meanings, most of them equally vague and ideological. Uses range from British social anthropology in the 1960s through to Bhabha and followers. The general notion is that translation is not just of texts, but of entire cultural representations and identities. When an ethnographer describes a tribe, they thus translate a culture into the language of ethnography; museums offer iconic and linguistic translations of entire cultures; migrants translate themselves, forming cultural hybrids, and so on.	Ambiguous + Abstentious	If you want to use the term, specify what you mean. If not, **avoid**. Our general preference here is for a discipline focused on communication across different cultures and languages, rather than processes that occur within just one culture or language.

Our analysis
Term fits different meanings – depending on context;
Term changes depending on collocations;
The word "cultural" is bound to so many different things: it couldn't identify a translation *per se*.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Direct vs. indirect translation	"Indirect translation" is usually the historical process of translation from an intermediary version. For example, Poe was translated into French by Baudelaire, then from French into Spanish by a number of poets. The Spanish versions would then be called "indirect translations", and the first translation, into French, could then logically be called "direct translation". Indirect translations are sometimes called "retranslations" (*q.v.*), which is simply confusing, or "mediated translations", which makes some sense (except that translators themselves are mediators, so all translations could be mediated), or "relay translations" (on the model of "relay interpreting"), or "second-hand translations" (suggesting the inferiority of "second-hand cars"). These terms are sometimes mixed up with *traducción directa*, which is the Spanish term for work into the translator's A language, and Gutt's use of "indirect translation" to describe a translation that does not aim at interpretative resemblance to the source text. In short, we have created a mess. Dollerup (1998) argues that the term "indirect translation" is misleading and "should be kept for the situations where two parties must communicate by means of a third intermediary realisation which has no legitimate audience" (1998: 19). Dollerup proposes the term "relay translation" (calqued on "relay interpreting", *q.v.*), defined as "a mediation from source to target language in which the translational product has been realised in another language than that of the original; the defining feature is that the intermediary translation has an audience, that is consumers of its own" (1998: 19). The problem here seems to be that the "relay" idea describes the action of the first translator (Baudelaire in our example), whereas what is significant is the action of the second translator (the translators from French into Spanish).	Ambiguous + Abstentious	In the absence of any really happy solution, stick with **indirect translation** and accept **mediated translation**. Avoid the others.

Our analysis
Term has synonymous terms – depending on context, origin, and/or language of user;
Term is a misnomer – no longer used;

We agree the term "direct translation" can cause a bit of confusion; we believe things could be much easier if we simply used both terms "translation" and "indirect translation".

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Editing	The making of amendments to a text in a situation where linear progression is either absent (in the case of an automatically generated text, from MT for example) or completed (i.e. the drafting or translating has been completed). Editing may apply to translations or non-translations although the term **revising** (*q.v.*) (self-revising or other-revising) is to be preferred for work on translations. When machine-translation output is being corrected or amended, the most appropriate term is **post editing** (*q.v.*) (since "revising" would imply that an entire human drafting process has been completed). The various types of editing can be found in standard textbooks (copy-editing, stylistic editing, structural editing) and can be adapted to suit the problem to be solved.	Ambiguous	The term **revising** (*q.v.*) (self-revising or other-revising) is to be preferred for work on translations

Our analysis
Term changes depending on collocations;
We also believe this term is quite vague: it should be always applied with a collocation to simplify understanding.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Equivalence	A widespread term for a relation that many believe in and no one can prove beyond the level of terminology (*q.v.*). We should accept that equivalence has no ontological foundation, since translation problems (*q.v.*) allow for more than one viable solution. This means that, in the field of translation problems thus defined, equivalence is always "*belief* in the translation as equivalent of an ST".	Abstentious	Always make it clear that equivalence means **equivalence-belief**, and indicate who is supposed to be holding that belief.

Our analysis
Term has evolved into a more modern term;
One of the most difficult terms to be analyzed, once "equivalence" will never be proved since it is dependent on one's point of view. We agree collocation "belief" does make it more attainable.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Inverse translation	Occasionally seen as a translation of "traducción inversa", which is the way the Spanish language has sought to describe work into the translator's non-native languages (L2, L3, etc.). Since the term suggests you are going the wrong way (when translators in smaller cultures often have to work this way), it is ideologically loaded and professionally indefensible.	Ambiguous + Abstentious	**L2 translation** (although it may also be L3, etc.).

Our analysis
Term fits different meanings – depending on context;
Term has evolved into a more modern term;
"Inverse" is very ambiguous; it sounds as if the translator is going the wrong way; L2 into L3, L3 into L4 (and so on) seem more appropriate.

Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Postediting:	The most appropriate term for the process of making corrections or amendments to automatically generated text, notably machine-translation output. The term works in opposition to **pre-editing** (*q.v.*), which is the main alternative means of enhancing MT output quality (by editing the ST language prior to the MT process). These two terms do not make much sense in situations where there is no automatic text generation involved.	Standard	Use, and that use can also legitimately be of the hyphenated form "post-editing".
Our analysis **Term fits perfectly;** It is definitely a term part of Translation Terminology.			
Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Pre-editing:	The preparation of ST language prior to an automatic translation process, mainly with respect to standardized lexis, simplified syntax and the removal of any other causes of ambiguity. Pre-editing might be seen as a form of translation into a controlled language.	Standard	The term is so standardized that Pym made no recommendation
Our analysis **Term fits perfectly;** It is definitely a term part of Translation Terminology.			
Term	Meaning (s)	Category	Pym's recommendation
Repair:	Term for instances of what some term "in-draft revision" or "online revision" (*q.v.*), usually involving the quick fixing of typographical errors, terminology, and syntactic recasting, without initiation of a separate revision stage. The term "repair" has the added advantage of being used in the study of interpreters' performances, for much the same thing.	Standard	Use **repair** wherever appropriate.
Our analysis **Term fits perfectly;** Undoubtedly, this term belongs to Translation Terminology.			

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