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THE PROBLEM OF ABBREVIATIONS IN SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION

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The aim of this paper is to examine the problem of abbreviations and the strategies used to ensure clarity and accuracy in specialized translation. Being used in expert communication with the aim of increasing conciseness and efficiency, abbreviations present a unique challenge that stems from the difficulty of disambiguation and correlation with the extended terminological unit. Therefore, using appropriate strategies of translation will aid the translator in avoiding errors and reflecting accurately the concept in the target text.

Keywords: *abbreviation, term, concept, specialized language, specialized translation, ambiguity, translation strategies.*

PROBLEMA ABBREVIERILOR ÎN TRADUCEREA SPECIALIZATĂ

Lucrarea urmărește examinarea problemei abrevierilor și strategiile utilizate pentru a asigura claritatea și acuratețea în traducerea specializată. Folosite în comunicarea de experți cu scopul de a crește concizia și eficiența, abrevierile prezintă o provocare unică care decurge din dificultatea dezambiguizării și corelării cu unitatea terminologică extinsă. Prin urmare, utilizarea strategiilor adecvate de traducere va ajuta traducătorul să evite erorile și să reflecte cu acuratețe conceptul în textul țintă.

Cuivinte-cheie: *abreviere, termen, concept, limbaj specializat, traducere specializată, ambiguitate, strategii de traducere.*

Introduction

Specialized languages – defined by Maria Teresa Cabré as „a set of subcodes each of which can be specifically characterized by certain particulars such as subject field, type of interlocutors, situation, speakers’ intentions, the context in which a communicative exchange occurs, the type of exchange, etc. [1, p. 59]” – are characterized by an extensive use of abbreviations that have the purpose to increase conciseness and efficiency in the communications among experts in a particular domain. Nevertheless, there are instances when the presence of abbreviations in a specialized text can lead to an opposite effect, becoming a source of ambiguity and creating difficulties in the comprehension and translation of scientific and technical information. The aim of this paper is to explore the difficulties associated with abbreviations in specialized translation and examine the strategies translators can employ to ensure clarity and accuracy in the transfer of meaning from source language into the target language.

Abbreviations in Specialized Translation

When it comes to the research within the domain of lexicology, Elisa Mattiello states that there is no unified approach to the study of the phenomenon of abbreviation and no unified terminology partially motivated by the lack of interest, and partially by the fact that abbreviations have been viewed as irregular creations. Thus, they have been deemed unpredictable and excluded from the morphological theories [2, p. 65]. In the realm of terminological research, on the other hand, there are a lot of studies which are based primarily on the extraction of abbreviations from texts, their disambiguation and their association with the unabbreviated term. The extraction of abbreviations has been examined using several approaches, such as formulating rules or patterns, analysing co-occurrence statistics based on the linguistic context of abbreviations, and employing automatic recognition techniques. The study of disambiguation of abbreviations has focused on the words surrounding ambiguous terms as they often offer valuable and consistent clues for interpreting the meaning of an abbreviation. Therefore, the context is typically analysed in relation to previously examined contexts to clarify its meaning by comparing contextual similarities. These similarities are commonly measured by counting the number of shared words or instances where the contexts overlapped [3, p. 368].

An important distinction concerning the typology of abbreviations is provided by the International Organization of Standardization. Defined as designations that are created „by omitting parts from their full form and that represent the same concept”, abbreviations include:

- acronyms: „abbreviations that are made up of the initial letters of the components of the full form of a term or from syllables of the full form and that are pronounced syllabically”, e.g. *SPECT* – *single-photon emission computed tomography*, *GRASS* – *gradient refocused acquisition at steady state*;
- initialisms: „abbreviations that are made up of the initial letters of the components of the full form of a term or from syllables of the full form and that are pronounced letter by letter”, e.g. *MRI* – *magnetic resonance imaging*, *CRT* – *cardiac resynchronization therapy*;
- clipped terms: „abbreviations that are made up of a truncated term”, e.g. *Pro* – *proline*, *Val* – *valine*;
- blends: „designation that is formed by clipping and combining two or more words”, e.g. *methanol* – *methyl and alcohol* [4].

Renáta Panocová mentions that the phenomenon of abbreviation has been a characteristic of communication since ancient times, linguistic abbreviations emerging after the invention of phonetic writing [5, p. 90-91].

However, Charles W. Kreidler argues that the proliferation of clipped terms and acronyms is essentially a modern development. Examples can be found in Western Europe starting from the 16th century, but the extensive use of these terms is a characteristic of the late 19th century and the 20th century, with a significant cause of this phenomenon being the rapid development of technical vocabulary [6, p. 959].

According to Juan C. Sager, abbreviation is a process of creating terms or designating new concepts by modifying the existing linguistic resources [7, p.73]; therefore, abbreviations are placed within the category of terminological difficulties in the process of specialized translation. Maria Teresa Cabré argues that a terminological difficulty might stem from difficulties in understanding the term and its pragmatic features in the original text, or from challenges in finding equivalent terms. To address the terminological challenges that emerge during translation, which typically involve finding an equivalent or choosing the most suitable one, translators rely on three primary types of resources: monolingual textual resources (subject-specific texts), terminological resources (bilingual and multilingual dictionaries, terminological databases), bilingual or multilingual textual resources (parallel or comparable multilingual corpora) [8, p. 359].

Although abbreviations are a part of the terminological system, their presence in specialized texts poses additional challenges due to the nature of this means of term creation. In the process of forming terms through compounding or derivation, these terms usually designate new phenomena or concepts, whereas terms formed by abbreviation are used with the purpose of renaming or providing more convenient designations for already existing concepts or phenomena, although there are cases where clipped terms acquire a different meaning [6, p. 959]; thus, adding to the difficulty of their translation.

Juan C. Sager notes that abbreviations are viewed as a means of achieving lexical compression in specialized languages [9, p. 1927]. Condensing information through lexical compression facilitates the use of complex terminology and conciseness in expert communication, conciseness being claimed by Maria Teresa Cabré as one of the features that distinguishes the scientific text because it “reduces the possibility of distortions in the information” [1, p. 47]. „Besides naming and conciseness, the presence of abbreviations in specialized languages contributes to the sense of professional closeness, creating „the effect of cohesiveness among insiders”, according to Elisa Mattiello. While that might increase understanding among the specialists in a particular domain, the use of abbreviations could make the information „obscure to non-experts” [10, p. 160], creating problems in the process of translation. A factor that might counterbalance this negative impact is anaphoric and cataphoric references that “create a network of co-references within the text” [10, p. 160], providing the translator with necessary tools for correct disambiguation of abbreviated terms.

James A. Kushlan suggests that when communication takes place entirely within a small professional group, the use of abbreviations is not an obstacle to the clarity and efficiency of the communication process. A problem arises when trying to go outside this group, abbreviations being an impediment to interdisciplinary communication. Thus, the author mentions three ways that would facilitate the comprehension of abbreviations, one of which would be belonging to the professional group, another way being the use of the

context, because in most cases the concepts behind the abbreviations are suggested by the context. The third way is to identify and define abbreviations in the text [11, p.1-2].

Peter Newmark places abbreviations in the category or so called „unfindable” words [12, p. 176] emphasizing the difficulty they pose for the translators. He adds that every year a large number of such terms are created to be part of specialised vocabularies in different domains. When it comes to the proliferation of various types of abbreviations, he observes that acronyms are more abundant, often being ad hoc creations „for the purpose of the article in which they appear or for the school of a particular discipline”. He notes that the increasing tendency of including abbreviations in specialized dictionaries and bodies of books is a promising development [12, p. 180] that can serve as an aid in the process of translation.

According to Olga Kuzmina et al., it is widely recognized from practical experience that abbreviations are among the most challenging aspects of foreign specialized texts to comprehend and translate. Fully grasping these shortened lexical forms requires both a deep understanding of the subject matter to which the text relates and prior knowledge of the specific abbreviations used. However, being acquainted with the fundamental rules of abbreviation formation greatly aids in interpreting and translating these abbreviations. In order to correlate the abbreviation with the correct terminological unit, the following principles are utilized:

1. Context analysis. Typically, abbreviations are expanded upon their first mention in a text. Therefore, if someone is unfamiliar with an abbreviation and is only reading later sections, they will need to refer back to earlier parts of the text. This is particularly crucial if the abbreviations have not been explicitly expanded.

2. Dictionaries and other reference material. Using abbreviation dictionaries may seem like a reliable method for identifying meanings, but it has limitations. Abbreviations evolve quickly, causing these dictionaries to become outdated faster than other types of linguistic references. Many abbreviations in recent literature may not be included in existing dictionaries. To effectively use a dictionary, it is important to first identify the relevant field of knowledge based on the context. Additionally, a bilingual general and terminological dictionary is needed for accurate translation, as monolingual dictionaries only provide expansions, which can lead to errors.

3. Structure analysis. This method applies to complex abbreviations, which may include additional symbols. To expand these abbreviations correctly, understanding the function of these symbols is important.

4. Comparison. Comparisons are closely linked to analysing the structure of abbreviations and serve as a supplementary method that provides only an approximate understanding.

Olga Kuzmina et al. notes that with experience, a translator can identify specific abbreviation models within texts, enabling them to focus on common meanings of new abbreviations formed by those models [13, p. 552].

According to Aron Henriksson et al., a problem is that abbreviations are semantically overloaded to a much greater extent, with an abbreviation often having several possible extended forms with distinct meanings, leading to ambiguity [14, p. 2]. Another factor that generates ambiguity in the use of abbreviations is the fact that they are often not accompanied by the extended form of the term; thus, increasing the chances of misinterpretation when the abbreviation is associated with the incorrect term [15, p. 3658].

Another problem associated with the translation of abbreviations mentioned by Ewelina Kwiatak is the common practice of using pleonasm. A pleonasm is a superfluous word within a multi-word phrase. It can consist of synonymous terms, repetitions, or periphrastic expressions, elements that share similar meanings and highlight the tautological aspect of the phrase [16, p. 558], e.g. *HIV virus* (*HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus*).

Ilya Ulitkin et al. examine the causes of the difficulties that arise in interlingual translation of abbreviation that can be summarized as follows:

1. During the stage of identifying the abbreviations in the source text, due to a discrepancy in knowledge of the specialized domain problems might appear in the process of correlating the abbreviation with the full terminological unit.

2. The polysemy and homonymy of abbreviations can lead to ambiguity; therefore, creating difficulty in assigning the designation to the correct concept, e.g. *MI – myocardial infarction* and *MI– motor imagery*.

3. The variability of linguistic and cultural tradition of scientific literature can establish conditions that lead to cognitive errors.

The strategies that can aid translators in rendering abbreviations and resolving the difficulties associated with this process are:

1. Rendering the abbreviation from the source language using an equivalent abbreviation in the target language using the assistance or various resources such as dictionaries or terminological databases.
2. Borrowing the abbreviation form the source language in its original form, adapting it to the grammatical rules of the target language.
3. Transliteration and transcription in the case of a different alphabet.
4. Descriptive translation.
5. Creation of a new abbreviated form that can only be done in close collaboration with the specialists in the field and that requires approval by the expert community [17, p.9].

Conclusions

In conclusion, rendering abbreviations in specialized translation presents a unique challenge due to the need of balancing conciseness and efficiency in the communications among experts in a particular domain and the comprehensibility of the translated information. Translators are tasked with the correct disambiguation of the abbreviation in the source language and finding the most suitable equivalent in the target language. The completion of this task requires knowledge of the specialized domain, careful research, and the use of the appropriate strategies.

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