AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Department of International Relations

Chair of Diplomatic Translation

**Translation business in the field of international and legal relations**

**“Translation of Scientific and Technical Documents”**

2024-2025 academic year, fall semester

**Lecture 4**

**Module 1: Introduction to scientific and technical translation**

**Lecture 4 Grammatical features of scientific and technical texts**

**Introducing terminology**

One of the striking features of many technical and scientific genres is that they contain specialized vocabulary that is often not readily understandable to people who are not part of that discourse commu- nity. Terminology is not the only distinguishing feature of those genres, and future chapters will introduce other features, some of which offer interesting challenges to translators. However, technical and scientific translators also need strategies for dealing with terminology. This chapter first explains briefly what terms and concepts are and then guides you through some uses of corpus analysis tools to help you to research the terminology of a specialized subject domain or text.

**Terms and concepts**

A specialized subject domain is made up of objects with specific prop- erties. The objects might be parts of machinery, electronic compo- nents, engineering equipment, chemical compounds, atomic particles or manufacturing processes, to give just a few examples. We could describe an object in terms of its properties, for example what it is made of, how it looks and how it is used. We can regard those indi- vidual objects as belonging to a set or class of objects, and we can form a conceptualization or mental image of that class. From the range of properties displayed by the individual objects, we could also abstract a set of common characteristics, for example related to composition, form, function and usage. This abstraction or mental representation of the object is known as the **concept**, and the concept can then be defined using the set of **characteristics**. Thus, the concept is our mental repre- sentation of an object from a specialized domain, not the (physical) object itself but an abstracted unit of knowledge. To organize, refer to and communicate something about a concept, we give it a label or a designation in our language; that designation is the **term**. The collec- tion of terms for a subject domain is the **terminology** (specialized vocabulary) of that domain. So, when authors of texts want to refer to concepts of a subject domain, they will use terms. When we translate those texts into another language we generally need to know and use the corresponding term in the target language (TL), so that the target text also refers to that same concept in that specialized domain.

Terms therefore play an important role in communicating about concepts, particularly in those settings where there is a need to avoid ambiguity or vagueness. Many terms are well known and widely accepted within a discourse community, but sometimes a concept may be designated by two different, competing terms, making communica- tion about a specific concept and mutual understanding less clear-cut. Sometimes terms fall out of use, to be replaced by alternative terms which gain acceptance. Sometimes a concept is new or unknown and a new term has to be created to designate it in a particular language. Terms typically represent just one concept in a subject domain, but the same term could designate different concepts in different domains. Finally, it is also common for word forms that do not have specialized meanings in general language use to be used as terms, to designate a specific concept in a specialized subject domain. These scenarios can pose challenges for translators and highlight the need for careful terminological research and thorough conceptual understanding.

Most terms are nouns or noun phrases, but verbs and adjectives can also be terms. A term can be a single word (**simple term**) or a multi- word expression (**complex term**), but symbols, formulae and abbre- viations can also be terms. Terms may commonly co-occur with other expressions; recurrent patterns of phrases in discourse are called **phraseology**.

The next section focuses on how we can identify and research the terminology and phraseology of technical and scientific discourse, in preparation for translation tasks.

References

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