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University terminology: Why it is not just higher education terminology

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Abstract. Following a prescriptive approach, the University of Vienna aims to increase the consistent use of university-specific terminology in German and English. The University's terminological database is available to university employees and provides preferred German and English terms. By focusing on administrative university terminology the subfields provided in the University of Vienna's terminological database range from studying and teaching, research, human resources, international relations, infrastructure to designations of organizational units.

After the introduction of the three-cycle Bologna system envisaging the harmonization of the European higher education system, the University of Vienna is confronted with two coexisting higher education systems. The transition to the Bologna higher education system is accompanied by a change in university terminology. German terms that were introduced to help separate both higher education systems often result in terminological inconsistencies in German source texts and pose a challenge when searching for equivalent terms in English. Thus terminological inconsistencies can occur on several levels and need to be considered in terminology standardization.

Keywords. Bologna framework, higher education system, prescriptive terminology work, terminological database, terminology standardization, university terminology, UniVieTerm.

1. Introduction

Internationalization is a key objective for the University of Vienna, the largest University in Austria. The terminological database of the University of Vienna contributes to the internationalization of the University as it provides standardized German and English university-specific terms.

After defining the scope of university terminology and distinguishing university terminology from higher education terminology, subfields of administrative university terminology are identified for the University of Vienna. Moreover, the management and standardization of university terminology at the University of Vienna is illustrated by the University's terminological database UniVieTerm.

Terminology work in the area of university terminology reveals terminological inconsistencies between and within Austrian universities. The reasons for terminological inconsistencies and the characteristics of Austrian university terminology are discussed and related to the implementation of the Bologna framework in Austria and to the autonomy of universities to independently coin terms in some areas of their activities.

2. Definition and scope of university terminology

Delimiting the subject field of university terminology and its subfields requires the definition of university terminology, but a clear-cut definition of university terminology is lacking in the literature. One approach to define the scope of university terminology is to start with defining the terms *higher education* and *university*. The fields of terminology pertaining to these two concepts can be derived from the definitions of both terms. Higher education is legally defined as “[a]ll types of courses of study, or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognized by the relevant authorities [...] as belonging to its higher education system” (The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications 1997). The

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Oxford English Dictionary online describes university as “[a]n institution of higher education offering tuition in mainly non-vocational subjects and typically having the power to confer degrees”. This definition shows that university terminology is a subfield of higher education terminology because higher education encompasses not only courses of study at universities but also at vocational schools and other institutions.

University terminology as the field of terminology “[a]n institution of higher education offering tuition in mainly non-vocational subjects and typically having the power to confer degrees” (OED 2013) concentrates on is a rather broad definition. This broad field of university terminology can be subdivided into a) academic university terminology – terminology used by the disciplines represented at a university – and b) administrative university terminology – terminology “relating to or required for the running of a [university]” (OED 2013). Thus administrative university terminology is the subfield of university terminology that comprises terms that all university members are confronted with when working, researching or studying at a university. At the University of Vienna, the difference between administrative and academic terminology is also reflected by the internal structure of the University. The University is subdivided in academic units and non-academic, administrative units. A clear distinction between administrative and academic terminology cannot always be drawn because the main activities of universities, e.g. research, teaching, administration and studying are intertwined and depend on each other to a certain degree. Subfields of (administrative) university terminology can be delimited according to the internal (administrative) structure of universities. At the University of Vienna the subfields of administrative university terminology according to the internal structure are studying and teaching, research and career development, human resources, international relations, infrastructure and organization.

Austrian university terminology relies primarily on two sources: a) terminology specified by legislation and regulations and b) corporate terminology of Austrian universities. Corporate terminology in the university context means that some terms are unique to a certain university and are not contained in legislation or specialized dictionaries.

3. Managing university terminology

To manage and standardize administrative university terminology the University of Vienna created a terminological database called UniVieTerm. The purpose of UniVieTerm is to be a reference tool for university staff containing university-specific, administrative terms in German and English. It also provides easy access to terms preferred by the University of Vienna’s terminology standardization committee.

Terminology standardization at the University of Vienna aims to achieve consistency in university-specific terminology as part of a corporate identity, to facilitate internal and external communication by “avoiding competing designations for the same concept” (Chiocchetti & Ralli 2013: 32). Terminology work at the University of Vienna in the area of university terminology follows the principles of prescriptive terminology work, but the University has a “less forceful, less prescriptive attitude that recommends, rather than dictates, the use of a form” (Cabr e & Sager 1999: 211). The recommended university terms in German are predominantly derived from legislation and regulations. The terminology standardization committee at the University of Vienna selects the most appropriate English terms. In UniVieTerm these preferred terms are highlighted as recommended English terms that should be preferably used when translating German source texts into English.

UniVieTerm is based on systematic terminology work (cf. Mayer & Seewald-Heeg 2009: 14) and concentrates on administrative university terminology and its subfields that are derived from the internal structure of the University. However, “ad-hoc terminology work” (Chiocchetti & Ralli 2013: 23) and translation-based terminology work (cf. Mayer & Seewald-Heeg 2009: 15) also play an important role because translators or university employees ask for English translations of university terms as well.

The main target group and the majority of UniVieTerm end-users are university employees. Other types of end-users are terminologists, translators and members of the terminology standardization committee. The university staff is a heterogeneous user group consisting of academic and non-academic employees without or with only little experience in the practices and methods of terminology work. However, terminology management systems available on the market are primarily tailored to the needs of terminologists. As the majority of UniVieTerm end-users are non-terminologists their needs are crucial for the design of the University of Vienna's terminological database. University employees and their needs also determine the amount and content of terminological data provided in UniVieTerm. So the layout, the terminological information and thus the overall usability of the terminological database are based on the needs of university staff. To enhance the commitment of end-users, they can actively contribute to the further development of UniVieTerm by suggesting new terms, giving feedback on terminological information and expressing their terminological needs.

4. Austrian university terminology in a period of transition

4.1. Terminological inconsistencies between and within Austrian universities

Austrian university terminology is currently in a period of transition as legislative changes restructured the Austrian higher education system. In 2002, the last major changes occurred in Austrian university legislation. The Austrian Universities Act altered the internal structure of Austrian universities, granted their autonomy and implemented the Bologna framework in Austria. Although the 2002 Universities Act standardized some university terms in German, it also enabled the emergence of corporate terminologies, i.e. universities are able to coin their own German terms in those areas that are not specified by legislation. Examples for corporate terminologies are German terms coined by Austrian universities to designate the "officer to administrate matters concerning the enforcement of study law in the first instance" as stipulated in the 2002 Universities Act, section 19, para. 2. The German designations used for this body by Austrian universities include *Studiendekan*, *Curriculumdirektor* or *Studienpräses* (cf. Ralli, Stanizzi & Wissik 2007a: 11).

In addition to terminological inconsistencies between universities, there are also terminological inconsistencies within universities. Terminology work carried out in the UniVieTerm project depicts the development of university terminology in German. Thus it also reveals that some superseded German terms are still used by a small number of university members. One example for the use of superseded Austrian university terms is the superseded German term *Immatrikulation* used for designating the admission to a university. Nevertheless, the preferred German term used for designating the admission to a university is *Zulassung*.

Austrian university terminology is also influenced by the neighboring German-speaking countries. On the one hand, there are university terms in German that are identical in meaning, e.g. *Studiengang* and *Studienrichtung*. The first German term is predominantly used in Germany and the latter is predominantly used in Austria. Both terms designate the same concept, i.e. study program. Problems only arise when different designations used for the same concept create the impression that they designate different concepts. On the other hand, there are terms used in the German-speaking neighboring countries that differ in meaning to the Austrian term and lead to terminological inconsistencies and misunderstandings. Ralli, Stanizzi & Wissik (2007b: 287) attribute these intralingual terminological incongruities to the large amount of culture-specific terms, the degree of freedom Austrian universities have to coin their own terms, and cultural differences between German-speaking countries and their legal and higher education systems.

Terminological differences within and between Austrian universities are due to changes in domestic university legislation, the autonomy of universities and the persistent use of superseded German terms in university communication.

4.2. Implementation of the Bologna higher education reform

Higher education systems within the EU have still not achieved the level of comparability as intended by the European Commission by the implementation of the Bologna framework (Nickel 2011: 11). From a terminological point of view, this means that finding equivalent terms in another language is still rather difficult because university terminology and its legal basis are country-specific and not based on a common extralinguistic reality (cf. Mayer 1998: 77). However, the Bologna process aiming at harmonizing the higher education systems in Europe already changed the Austrian higher education system. In the current period of transition from the domestic higher education system to the Bologna framework, two higher education systems are coexisting in Austria, i.e. the three-cycle Bologna system and the 'old' Austrian system. The higher education systems that exist in parallel during the transition period have also consequences for the university terminology in use at the University of Vienna. The diversity of university terminology is also reflected by the academic degrees currently awarded to graduates of the University of Vienna. They comprise *Bakkalaureus/Bakkalaurea*, *Magister/Magistra*, *Bachelor*, *Master*, *Doktor/Doktorin* and *PhD*. Graduates of the diploma and *Magister* programs are awarded a *Magister* degree and graduates of baccalaureate programs a *Bakkalaureus* degree. These three programs are phased out according to the Bologna framework. Bachelor's, master's, doctoral and PhD programs are programs that are already in line with the Bologna process.

The coexistence of the old and new programs at the University of Vienna is one reason for terminological inconsistencies in English texts containing university terminology. The German terms of the old and new systems cannot be used interchangeably because they are not synonymous. In English translations some university members use the term *master's program* to designate a *Magister* program. Although *Magister* and master's programs are similar in structure, duration, content, etc. they cannot be used synonymously because the degrees awarded after successful completion of the programs are not the same (*Magister* v. *Master*).

To distinguish the domestic higher education system and the Bologna system in this period of transition, new German university terms are introduced in Austria. This includes that German designations used for the domestic system and German designations used for the Bologna framework are different. Examples are the terms for *curriculum*: The German term *Studienplan* is used to designate curricula that were effective until the introduction of the Universities Act. The new German term *Curriculum* was introduced by the 2002 Austrian Universities Act and its use is reserved for degree programs that were set up according to the Bologna reform. The German terms *Studienplan* and *Curriculum* are means to distinguish the old and new Austrian higher education systems.

German terms that are used to draw a clear distinction between the Austrian higher education system that is phased out and the Bologna higher education system pose a challenge when searching for English equivalent terms. Therefore the question arises whether to use the same English term for both German designations or whether to introduce neologisms in English to emphasize and maintain the distinction between these systems in English as well. However, finding English university terms that are identical in scope and meaning to the German university terms, i.e. "exact equivalence" (ISO 5964:1985) is extremely rare. This is also due to the "Systemgebundenheit des Hochschulrechts" (Ralli, Stanizzi & Wissik 2007b: 289) which renders it difficult to find equivalent terms in another language as higher education systems have their individual concepts and knowledge structures that differ from other higher education systems. Terminological gaps also reveal the "Systemgebundenheit" of and cultural differences between higher education systems.

Due to the internationalization strategy of the University of Vienna, English has been defined as the target language in which university terminology is available in UniVieTerm. Although English has evolved "as a lingua franca" (Seidlhofer 2011) or "as an international language" (Jenkins 2000), cross-cultural misunderstandings are inevitable. Glückstad & Mørup (2012:65) state that cross-cultural misunderstandings in English are often caused by not being able to

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identify the 100% equivalent concept and by different cultural backgrounds, i.e. knowledge about the university systems in the respective countries interferes.

The Bologna process reorganized the Austrian higher education system and also the Austrian university terminology. To separate the old and new higher education systems, Austrian university terminology is characterized by German terms that belong either to the old domestic system or German terms that belong to the Bologna system. This distinction also renders it difficult to find target language equivalent terms.

5. Conclusion

Austrian university terminology is influenced by European legal developments and corporate terminologies of universities. Therefore inconsistencies and neologisms in university terminology occur on several levels. The implementation of the Bologna reform in Austria resulted in a higher education system that is currently in a period of transition. In this period, the Austrian and Bologna higher education systems are distinguished by different German terms. German terms that are used to draw a clear distinction between the systems are either specified by legislation or by the universities themselves. The partially standardized university terminology on a national level, the complexity of the higher education system and the autonomy of universities to coin their own German terms in some fields lead to terminological inconsistencies between and within universities. Finding equivalent terms, i.e. terms that are identical in meaning, in another language is a daunting task as higher education systems are country-specific and university terminology can be university-specific.

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