

About linguistics and environmental terminology (need for study)

Abstract

The environment is a recent science in terms of terminology, and scientific translators need to be trained to convey the environmental awareness of society and science, as well as the technical jargon that prevails in technical fields. Furthermore, translation plays a central role in the dissemination of knowledge, and the lack of terminological uniformity in dictionaries, due to the terminological dynamism and interdisciplinary nature of the different environmental sectors, means that the translator must create specific glossaries due to the lack of reference documents.

Keywords: environment, terminology, interdisciplinarity, scientific translator

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Introduction

Ecology as a science is recent, both historically and lexicographically. In the last century, its evolution has been notable starting from the 1930s with studies on thermodynamics and, above all, from the mid-century with the emergence of various disciplines, such as paleontology or anthropology, and systems theory.¹ However, the imminent concern to resolve the direct consequences of environmental disasters that resulted from the Stockholm summit in 1972 led to an acceleration of interdisciplinary studies with the environment as the central focus. This has caused a dynamic and unsettled terminological and lexicographic landscape, as the vast and varied intersection of disciplines usually associated with the environment is compounded by dictionaries reluctance to integrate many emerging terms, whose use is considered transient due to the continuous evolution of science. Here, translation plays a central role, as it allows access to global information from the most developed fields in certain countries. Although traditionally the influence of English in science has marked a rite of textual translations and technical terms,² since its linguistic adaptation would mean a change in already internalized terminology,³ Spanish has gradually extended its scientific boundaries. Specifically, the report offered by the Instituto Cervantes in 2020 on Spanish in the world reveals that it is the second global language of scientific publication, that 4.3% of production is based in a Spanish-speaking country, and that, between 2009 and 2019, the relative weight of serialized publications increased by 31%, more than in French and English, despite the evident hegemony of the latter.

In the case of the environment, scientific research and innovation are crucial to defend natural resources, whose integrity is being undermined by disasters caused by climate change and pollution. Therefore, the scientific translator faces training that allows them to convey the environmental awareness of society and science, in addition to the technicalities that prevail in technical fields. To this end, from a didactic point of view, Acuyo Verdejo⁴ highlights for the subject of Specialized Translation the study of instrumental, thematic, textual, and professional (sub) competence, with the aim of covering the most immediate didactic points in this profession: from the specific terminological knowledge of the document, along with the study of the present discursive genre, to the use of auxiliary resources and the deontic aspects that encompass the task. It is perhaps in specialized translation where documentary resources stand out for their presence

and immediacy, for their role as intermediaries, and for their vastness in capturing a niche of language for a specific purpose, which supports the idea that “more than being an expert in the field, the translator must be an expert in the extraction, management, and representation of knowledge”.⁵

On the other hand, specialized translation entails, like other types of translation, adopting linguistic-translational solutions of any kind. Consider, for example, an assignment about a guide explaining the functioning of wind turbines in an offshore wind farm: the translator must decide whether to resort to the acclaimed use of interference (parque marino o parque offshore) or choose the correct terms based on the diatopic variety of the recipient (desarrollo sostenible o desarrollo sustentable), among others; they will develop a full understanding of the text by documenting themselves intensively, even resorting to expert supervision, since, for example, generating plants must withstand voltage disturbances that can be of magnitude (balanced disturbance caused by a three-phase short circuit) or angle (unbalanced disturbance caused by a single-phase or two-phase short circuit); and finally, they will integrate the new knowledge into their repertoire.

For all these reasons, documentary competence represents one of the most important pillars in translator training and is hindered by the lack of interdisciplinarity and research within universities. The dynamism brought by the field of ecology does not always leave a trace in vocabularies and glossaries due to its changing nature, and this causes dictionaries to lack terminological uniformity. Therefore, parallel and comparable texts become the main linguistic-terminological resource available to the translator due to the multidisciplinary nature of the environment and, consequently, the vastness of fields and areas it can affect. As an example, and without being exhaustive, the collection of resources to create specific corpora can involve several tools: legal databases for environmental legislation (ECOLEX, DAUE, DoGi, EUR-Lex, CENDOJ, BOE, etc.); legal journals on the environment (Revista Iberoamericana de Derecho Ambiental, Revista de Derecho Ambiental, etc.); popular science journals (Boletín Ciencias de la Tierra, Retema, Tecnología Ambiental, Observatorio Medioambiental, etc.); institutions and associations on the environment (Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, UNEP, Grupo Clima, etc.); environmental portals and websites (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, UN Environment Program, InforMEA, etc.);

terminological databases (IATE, Eurovoc, Eurotermbank, Termbank 2.0, etc.) and freely accessible specific multilingual glossaries.⁶

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Conflicts of interest

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