Terminology in the European Parliament
Moving with the times

Rodolfo Maslias

INTRODUCTION

European Union legislation is drafted in 24 official languages. Acts drawn up in each of the languages all constitute groundbreaking legislation which can be challenged before national and European courts and in many cases take precedence over national law.

Thousands of translators in the European institutions cover over 500 language combinations, a mechanism which must be regularly brought into line with constantly evolving legislative procedures and support media.

In this connection, the importance of terminology has become steadily clearer. With the development of inter-institutional translation memories (Euramis), previously separate resources such as the Commission's Eurodicautom or Parliament's Euterpe have merged into a common terminology database, IATE (developed by a Greek company).

In 2008, Parliament decided to set up a unit to coordinate the terminology generated within the translation units.

It is principally concerned with Parliament's contribution to the IATE database, that is to say the introduction of new terms stored by translators either directly or by means of a macro for the most rapid entry of every search result. This also involves the storage and updating of terms and references and the addition of missing terms in all languages, as well as the coordinated validation of terms automatically entered on the IATE public database, which contains 8.5 million terms and receives on average 3500 queries per hour from the entire world.

The second major area of activity concerns software supports such as term extractors and communication, involving a strong and continuous presence on the internal network (intranet).

Precisely because the EU institutional websites are only accessible on internal networks, Parliament's Terminology Unit has created a public website containing basic information and material for the purposes of external cooperation with hundreds of universities and other organisations in the field of terminology.

Inter-institutional cooperation in the context of IATE (consolidation)

Data entry and storage on the EU terminology database (IATE) must of necessity be brought into line with the complex stages of the legislative procedure, involving repeated interventions by the three legislative bodies, each in its different way, drafts, tripartite discussions, modifications at various levels, consultation of legal experts and amendments, as well as voting in the parliamentary committees and, finally, in the plenary.

The institution which makes the primary entry retains authorship thereof. Additions by other

institutions are admissible (with reference being made to the relevant institution), while any amalgamation or deletion requires inter-institutional agreement. This involves a special procedure in each of the institutions, starting from the processing of terms (attribution, definition and origin) in each language by their translation teams and coordination by their terminology units, which also 'arbitrate' in those rare cases where differences of opinion arise regarding entries. The database is managed by an inter-institutional team chaired in turn by one of the institutions contributing to IATE and the funding thereof. It is currently chaired by the Translation Centre, which caters for all the Commission's specialised services (agencies) such as CEDEFOP in Thessaloniki. The Translation Centre also houses the team of experts responsible for the technical maintenance and constant improvement of the database in accordance with the priorities established by the management team. Parliament's Terminology Unit is constantly gathering observations and recommendations from over 100 terminologists in the 23 translation units and, together with the technical team, organises sessions involving use of the database in practice with a view to identifying problems (hands-on sessions).

The IATE database receives support and funding from the three legislative institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament), the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the Court of Auditors and the Translation Centre. The European Court of Justice, the European Investment Bank and the European Central Bank are also involved, contributing specialist glossaries. In addition, the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank compile comprehensive terminologies in cooperation with the national authorities. Of particular value in the translation of countless pages containing specialist terminology generated by the sudden emergence of the world economic crisis in 2008 was the glossary drawn up in all languages by the European Central Bank in cooperation with the national central banks. Another example is cooperation between the ECJ and the national legal authorities in compiling terms drawn from the case law of the various Member States for entry on the IATE database. It should be noted in particular that an additional criteria applies to each entry specifying the different uses of a particular term in a given language, depending on the national system. For example, differences frequently arise between Greece and Cyprus or Germany and Austria regarding case-law terminology.

Last but not least, the contribution of all EU agencies (coordinated by the Translation Centre) is extremely valuable, an outstanding example being the OHIM database compiled by the EU agency in Alicante responsible for registering trade marks..

Terminology management in the European Parliament

The Unit was set up in 2008 staffed by three permanent officials and, because of the great difficulty in creating new EU institutional posts, it secured the services of trainees with the greatest relevant expertise drawn from a total of around 60 in Parliament's Translation DG chosen from thousands of applicants. Traineeships last for three months and may be extended for an additional three. Over the last two years officials recruited to the unit through internal competitions have been assigned specific tasks under the following establishment plan:
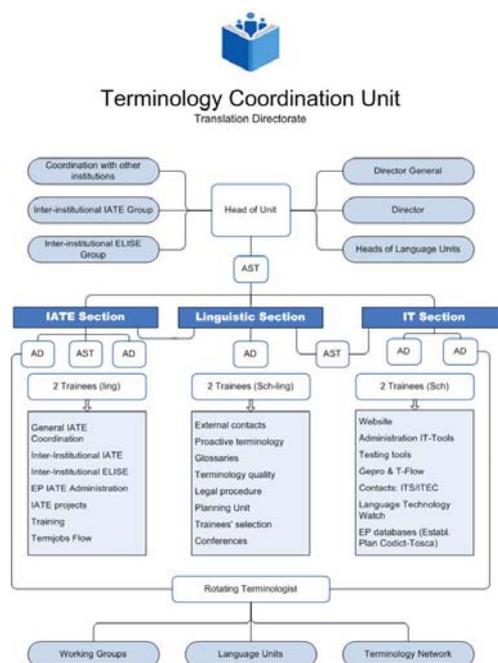
Cooperation with the other units is based on:

1. a network of 100 terminologists (designated by their superiors) who carry out terminological assignments sent by the Terminology Unit through Planning to the translation units accompanied by an FdR,

2. volunteer working groups for certain projects and

3. a translator seconded to the unit for three months responsible for liaison with the translation units and for identifying best practices.
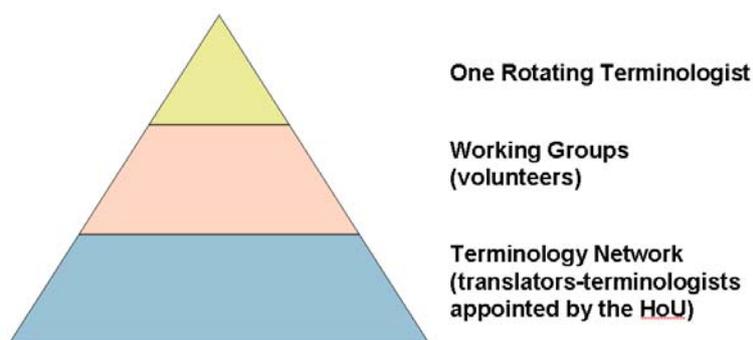
Parliament's Terminology Unit works on projects in specialist fields with the participation of trainees from all language units seconded for two weeks of their three-month traineeship. Their activities are coordinated by our own trainees under the supervision of permanent staff members, enabling them to acquire acquiring further management experience. The quality of their work in each language is checked by the terminologists responsible. Following processing and validation, our service then enters the terms on the IATE database. The largest of these projects is the completion of human rights terminology, for which Parliament

has assumed responsibility. Other projects concern financial terminology, taxation, inheritance law and the environment, areas which are covered by many of the texts translated by Parliament under the legislative procedure. Trainees are also involved in two projects of a more technical nature, the IATE Feeding Project which involves searching on Eurlex for sets of specialist terms and the definitions thereof contained in legal acts, as well as their entry in all languages on 'aligned' charts, so as to fill any gaps in pre-2004 IATE data with appropriate terms in the new languages.   The Term Extraction Project also makes it possible to use and assess the various terminology management software packages using a combination of statistical and linguistic criteria.

In 2010, Parliament's translation units translated total of 1.5 million pages in all languages, which amounts to over 10 pages per day for each translator. The workflow is not constant but fluctuates in a manner directly related to parliamentary proceedings, including the Strasbourg part-sessions, the Brussels 'mini-sessions' and the meetings of the parliamentary committees and political groups. This results in periods of peak demand with large numbers of urgent texts and imperative deadlines, given that no text can be put to the vote in any deliberative body if it is not available in every language.

A valuable service offered by the Terminology Unit in response to such situations is the advance preparation of specialist files ('proactive terminology'). With the help of the various services involved in the legislative process, it is able to keep track of the codecision procedure and thereby identify proposals for legislation containing specialist terminology and likely to generate numerous amendments and opinions well before they are sent for translation. With regard to each of these 'burning' political issues, our IATE team, in cooperation with terminologists from the various units prepares 'electronic files' containing links to specialist glossaries, previous texts on the same subject, any articles containing similar terminology and the principal related legislative texts already in force in the Member States. These files are incorporated on the internal website and made available to the translation units. Using 'Plato' software this content is linked to the automatic translation workflow system. The relevant FdR indicates the links to content of interest to each translator. In order to make this service as efficient as possible, we seek access to the originals at an early stage so as to compile lists of the principal terms contained therein using the relevant software applications and check whether they are contained on the IATE database before verifying or updating them. We then ask all the translation units to translate any missing terms so that they can be entered in full on the database before they appear in the texts to be translated.

Communication – groundbreaking initiatives

That which distinguishes the EP Terminology Unit from those of other institutions is the use of inside and outside contacts to enhance our terminological output. Its internal website is a very valuable and user-friendly tool for keeping terminologists and translators constantly informed, updated and motivated. Every Monday morning the week commences with an internal meeting at which each sections outlines a relevant area of its activity to be posted on the unit's website and the DG Translation homepage. It is also decided which of the activities in question will be mentioned in e-mails to each of the target groups. At these meetings the number of visitors to the internal and external website (http://termcoord.wordpress.com/) is analysed and our strategy adapted accordingly. In addition to matters with an obvious bearing on terminology and the IATE database, the website contains a number of interesting items such as discussions on etymological issues, reviews of books on terminology and translation, etc. To ensure that our unit remains up to date, we have created an electronic journal which

automatically scans the web on a daily basis, using appropriate key words in a given context, for content of interest to both us and the translators.

The need for an external website arose from our wealth of contacts with universities and terminological bodies throughout the world. It contains only information of use for our mutual cooperation.

This is accompanied by annual initiatives designed to heighten awareness among translators with regard to terminology. Last year's initiative concerned recycling terminology while this year the subject is the contribution of terminology to improving translation quality. In addition, our principal activities are outlined in a two-monthly printed bulletin.

Our second policy objective regarding communications is to maintain and continually extend our network of cooperation with university departments and public and private organisations in various countries directly or indirectly concerned with terminology. Cooperation in this area involves exchanges of terminology, presentations in Luxembourg by academic and research teams of varying sizes, attendance and presentations at conventions and at universities abroad, mutual website links and exchange arrangements for specialised colleagues. It also includes help in organising specialist seminars in the EP and external cooperation in specialist projects on the IATE database as well as cooperation in the field of software and the joint testing thereof.

Two particularly interesting examples of such external cooperation involve the universities of Turin and Ankara.

The Terminology Department of the Turin Legal Faculty is seeking to coordinate the activities of similar departments in all EU Member States with a view to compiling a consumer law glossary on the IATE database. These terms will be finalised and, following approval by the management committee, will replace current entries. This groundbreaking initiative could set the pattern for future cooperation with outside bodies.

The University of Ankara is seeking to verify the Turkish terms and references already

entered on the IATE database (not accessible on the public database, which appears in the official languages only). By way of experiment, its students are also being given the opportunity of translating terms contained in the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

Acting through the inter-institutional management committee, our unit provides support and guidance for such groundbreaking initiatives, giving students and terminological organisations the opportunity of contributing to the IATE database to our mutual advantage.

In May we submitted a comprehensive recommendation for the improvement and updating of the external database with a view to attracting more visitors, in view of the increased number of online terminology databases now available. We are seeking to develop a substantial portal with a manifestly European title containing general information regarding the work being done in the EU in this field using the IATE database and the currently internal ELISE communication tool, which automatically links up with all those involved in the drafting of legislative acts (translators, legal revisers, authors and administrators). We have recommended a number of technical improvements to bring the database more closely into line with the latest online developments.

Seminars

Each year our unit organises three seminars of great interest to translators from all the institutions. The seminars are organised under the heading 'Terminology in the Changing World of Translation'. Particularly successful was the joint presentation by the Commission, Council and Parliament of the linguistic/translation aspects of the legislative process in the form of a seminar entitled 'Terminology in Legislative Procedures'. These seminars, including the June seminar, entitled 'Terminology and Computer-Assisted Translation' or 'termITes & CATs', are attended by academics and representatives of private sector specialist firms concerned with the future prospects for terminology in machine-translation software. They are open to a limited number of external visitors and attract an audience of over 300 in the historic setting of the original European Parliament Chamber.