

Different Societies – Different Concepts. Difficulties in Compiling a Finnish-Russian Forestry Dictionary

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Abstract

The Department of Translation Studies at the University of Helsinki has launched a project to compile a Finnish-Russian forestry →dictionary, which will be based on students' M.A. theses. In addition to →terms and their →equivalents, it will contain →definitions, explanations, contexts and perhaps also comments.

The biggest problem is the abundance of conceptual differences between Finnish and Russian, which is partly due to the fact that Russian forest science was isolated from the western world for seven decades. Differences manifest themselves both in →partial equivalence of Finnish and Russian →terms, and in the existence of a large number of Finnish →concepts for which there is no →term in Russian. Consequently, suggestions have to be made with the help of Russian forest specialists.

The principal sources of information are parallel texts in Finnish and Russian, and also Finnish and Russian experts in different fields of forestry.

Keywords: dictionaries, forest terminology, silviculture, forest ecology, parallel texts, conceptual gaps, Finnish-Russian, Finland, Russia

1 Introduction

The Department of Translation Studies at the University of Helsinki has launched a project to compile a Finnish-Russian forestry →dictionary in silviculture and forest ecology. These fields are not much represented in the three existing Finnish-Russian forest →dictionaries, i.e. the multilingual *Lexicon forestale* (AHLSEVED *et al.* 1979), Jagodkin's Finnish-Russian forest technical →dictionary (JAGODKIN 1984/1996), and the multilingual forestry administration →dictionary (HYTTINEN 1997). The →dictionary will be based on students' M.A. theses. This kind of work is hoped to give translation students an opportunity to write theses that are useful and therefore motivating.

The →dictionary will contain →definitions, explanations, contexts and comments on conceptual differences. However, not all →terms will be accompanied by →definitions, only those which need elucidation. Such additional material is not very common in bilingual →dictionaries. Even specialised →dictionaries mostly contain only lists of →equivalents, sometimes accompanied with the most common →collocations.

2 Difficulties in Compiling the Dictionary

Compiling a Finnish-Russian forestry →dictionary is no easy task, especially if those who do the work are neither experts in forestry, nor fluent in Russian. One of the difficulties in compiling a new →dictionary is that the existing ones cannot be trusted. Other problems are caused by conceptual differences between Finnish and Russian.

2.1 The Unreliability of Existing Dictionaries

Unfortunately, →dictionaries are often unreliable. E.g. some of the →terms in Jagodkin's →dictionary (JAGODKIN 1984/1996) are seriously outdated (LJUBIMOV 1998). →Dictionaries may also contain →terms that are not really used in texts, but are literal translations. E.g. according to AHLVED *et al.* (1979), the Russian →equivalent of *kasvatushakkuu* [Fi], *intermediate cutting*, is *vospitatel'naja rubka* [Ru], "educational cutting", which creates the funny impression of educating trees by cutting them. The expression is a literal translation of *kasvatus* [Fi], which can be translated as "making grow" or as "education". The expression *vospitatel'naja rubka* [Ru] was not found in Russian texts or other sources (KARHU 1998). A better →equivalent of *kasvatushakkuu* [Fi] would be *promezhutochnoe pol'zovanie lesom* [Ru], *interventional forest utilization* (see CHUJKO 1995).

There are signs in the →dictionaries of the authors' lack of acquaintance with forestry texts: some →terms would be appropriate in other disciplines, but not in forestry.

2.2 Conceptual Differences between Finnish and Russian

The main difficulty in compiling a Finnish-Russian forestry →dictionary is the abundance of conceptual differences between Russian and Finnish. They are due to the fact that during the seven decades of the Soviet period Russian forest science was almost totally isolated from outside influences. Moreover, many fields of science, among others forest science, were used for ideological purposes. Russian was the *lingua franca* for all parts of the Soviet Union. Foreign languages were taught at Soviet schools, but people had no opportunities to use them (LJUBIMOV 1998).

The conceptual differences manifest themselves in two different ways. Firstly, many Finnish →concepts do not have →equivalents in Russian (and vice versa). In other words, there are conceptual gaps caused by cultural and societal differences. Secondly, some Finnish →concepts only have →partial equivalents in Russian.

Fields with especially many conceptual gaps and →partial equivalents include forest site typology, forest ecology, multiple-use forests, primary forest products, remote sensing and geographic information systems, harvesting systems, forest ownership, and forest administration.

2.2.1 Conceptual Gaps in Russian

The →term (*puu*)*tavaralajimenetelmä* [Fi], *timber type system*, could serve as an example of a conceptual gap in Russian in comparison with Finnish. This →term refers to a computerised system of harvesting used in Finland, by which a tree is bucked by a harvester into segments according to the wishes of buyers of timber (a combined shortwood and longwood method). In Russia such a system is used only by Finns working in the Russian territory near the Finnish border (Kuusela, pers. com.).

The →term *kulotus* [Fi], *prescribed burning*, is another example. In Finland prescribed burning is applied to a certain extent, and *kulotus* [Fi] is used also in the standard language. In Russia, on the other hand, prescribed burning is not used (Kuusela, pers. com.). The reason is obvious: extinguishing fires is so difficult in the vast forests of Russia that the risks of prescribed burning would by far exceed potential benefits. The only suggestion for an →equivalent of *kulotus* [Fi] is *szhiganie* [Ru], *burning* (see AHLVED *et al.* 1979), which has a much wider range of meaning. Some long and rather clumsy expressions describing this non-

existing (or only theoretically existing) phenomenon were found in a text written in the 1970s: *ochistka mest rubok s primeneniem ognja* [Ru], *clearing harvesting sites with fire*, *lesovozobnovitelnyj otzhig* [Ru], *forest regeneration fire*, *obrabotka pochvy ognem* [Ru], *preparation of soil with fire* (see PISARENKO 1973).

An interesting case is the search for an →equivalent of the Finnish →concept/→term *metsänparannus* [Fi], *forest improvement*. This →term refers to measures taken in order to maintain and to improve the productivity of forests, the quality of timber, and the conditions of in-woods transportation of timber. The →concept covers a wide range of different measures: regeneration of forest stands, prescribed burning, thinning of stands of young trees, pruning, fertilisation, drainage, road building (METSÄSANASTO 1995, s.v. *metsänparannustoiminta*).

There could, in principle, be an →equivalent in Russian meaning “the improvement of forests”, though the methods used might be different (Russian forests are neither fertilised nor drained, and, as was mentioned above, prescribed burning is not used). I have not, however, come across such a →term. Instead, a →term meaning something quite different is erroneously used as the →equivalent of *metsänparannus* [Fi] in →dictionaries and also in translations. This →term is *lesomelioratsija* [Ru] (see AHLSEVED *et al.* 1979, JAGODKIN 1984/1996) or *lesnaja melioratsija* [Ru], *forest amelioration*. *Lesomelioratsija* [Ru], it is true, means growing trees, but from Russian texts it turns out that the purpose of this practice is not to create timber or non-timber products, but to improve natural conditions for the benefit of people. It refers to the “struggle” against unfavourable natural conditions causing damage to national economy (e.g. LKM 1974). The →term *lesomelioratsija* [Ru], consequently, refers to growing trees in order to protect fields from winds or drought, to stop erosion or to bind sands, etc. (LKM 1974). So, instead of improving conditions in order to make forests grow (cf. *metsänparannus* [Fi]), *lesomelioratsija* [Ru] means growing trees in order to improve conditions. Consequently, the →concept *metsänparannus* is missing in Russian. Filling this gap with a non-equivalent Russian →concept may create confusion.

2.2.2 Conceptual Gaps in Finnish

If we were compiling a →dictionary from Russian into Finnish, there would be a different set of conceptual difficulties and there would be conceptual gaps in Finnish. Although this is not our central problem here, it may be useful to give some examples of such conceptual gaps to show that a Finnish-Russian →dictionary could not be converted into a Russian-Finnish one just by reversing the order of languages (as has been suggested).

In such a converted →dictionary quite a lot of entries would be of no use to someone trying to describe Russian reality to a Finn. On the other hand, all those Russian →terms would be missing which do not have a Finnish →equivalent, e.g. many →terms connected with non-boreal forests.

A glimpse into a draft of a monolingual terminological dictionary being prepared by the All-Russian Scientific Research and Information Centre for Forest Resources in Moscow (LH 1998) revealed some examples of Russian →concepts which do not exist in Finnish: *lesnye aukciony* [Ru], *forest auctions* (public auctions in order to decide to whom forest sites are let on a short-term basis), *lesnoj konkurs* [Ru], *forest contest* (a procedure of deciding to which forest utilizer or agricultural organisation forest land is let), *lesorubochnyj bilet* [Ru], *harvesting ticket* (a document which gives the forest utilizer the right to harvest and to haul timber, resin and secondary products). All these →concepts are rooted in the fact that forests in Russia are owned by the government, but harvested by various organisations and enterprises. In Finland only 32.3% of forests are government-owned (MALMBERG 1994), and the government sells timber like any enterprise or private person on the basis of the most profitable offer.

2.2.3 Partial Equivalents

In addition to conceptual gaps there are also innumerable Finnish →concepts with →partial equivalents in Russian. This is true of many fields of forestry. A very complicated field is that of harvesting. Without going into the details of the methods and purposes of harvesting, looking at the Finnish →term *hakkuu* [Fi], *logging, harvesting*, and its →partial equivalents in Russian gives an idea of the difficulties.

In Finland a tree is limbed, bucked and piled immediately after felling, and *hakkuu* [Fi] consequently covers felling, limbing, bucking and piling. In Russia, on the other hand, in final cutting, a tree may be (or at least used to be) skidded to a concentration point to be limbed and bucked – originally because conifer needles were used as stock feed (Kuusela, pers. com.). The →term *rubka/rubki* [Ru], *logging, harvesting*, is therefore usually defined as covering only felling and removing the tree from the forest (LE 1985, ЧУЖКО 1995). But because this procedure is not applied to thinning, the →definition of *rubka* [Ru] may also include “limbing etc.” (LR 1995). In other words, sources are inconsistent.

It seems, however, that due to extra-linguistic changes in Russia the wider →definition of *rubka* [Ru] is gaining increasing currency. According to Aleksandr Ljubimov, a research worker at the St. Petersburg Forestry Technical Academy, Russians no longer execute final cuttings by skidding trees to a concentration point: trees are limbed and bucked on the harvesting sites, and limbing and bucking are included in the →concept *rubka* [Ru].

In fact, the →concept of *rubka/rubki* [Ru] seems nowadays to cover the Finnish →concept *puunkorjuu* [Fi], *harvesting*, which includes the →concept *hakkuu* [Fi] and also removing the tree from the logging site. Thus, *rubka* [Ru] is synonymous with *zagotovka drevesiny (lesozagotovki)* [Ru].

3 Sources of Information

The examples mentioned above show how important it is to check and double-check every detail. It goes without saying that this is laborious and time-consuming work.

As for sources of information, the existing bilingual dictionaries are to be consulted with the utmost caution. The search for →equivalents can be started by looking up the →term in a dictionary (if it can be found), but then other sources are needed for finding out to what extent the suggested →equivalents really correspond to the →term in the other language. These other sources of information are mainly standards or dictionaries containing →definitions (or explanations), parallel texts, and experts in the particular field.

3.1 Standards and Dictionaries with Definitions or Explanations

The most reliable (though not infallible) sources of information about →terms and their meanings are standards. In general, standardisation of →terminology and also →terminology research are well developed in Russia, and very many institutions are active in these fields. However, there has been a great amount of new →terminology since the “perestroika”, to a great extent coming from the English language. Consequently, according to LJUBIMOV (1998) there is a “terminological chaos” in many fields of forestry.

As for dictionaries, the monolingual ones seem to be much more reliable sources of information than the bilingual ones: descriptions of the meanings of →terms are not distorted by the influence of another language. A valuable source in this respect is Kireev’s dictionary of ecological and geographic →terms in forest science (KIREEV 1984), which contains about

2,000 entries. Another useful dictionary is the (Russian-English-German-French) Multilingual Explanatory Dictionary of Forest Technical Terms (CHUJKO 1995), which contains →definitions both in Russian and in English. Its usefulness as a source of →definitions, it is true, is restricted to Russian, because the English →definitions seem to be written by Russians and define Russian →concepts.

In Finland, in spite of the vital importance of forestry for the economy of the country, not much work has been done in the field of forest →terminology (Lipsanen, this volume). Only four →dictionaries or →glossaries of forest →terms contain →definitions: METSÄSANASTO (1995) with 700 entries, an appendix with 450 entries in the booklet *Avain Suomen metsäteollisuuteen* (1996), and the Finnish-Swedish →dictionaries of wood science and forest technology (GRANVIK 1988 and 1993). In addition, the new ecological →dictionary *Ympäristösanasto* (1998) also contains a considerable amount of forestry →concepts and their →definitions.

3.2 Parallel Texts

The most important sources of information in →terminology work are parallel texts, i.e. authentic (not translated) texts on the same or a similar theme (preferably also with similar textual qualities) in both languages. The use of parallel texts has manifold functions. They

- help the reader to get acquainted with the subject matter;
- serve as the basis of →concept analysis and the representation of their relationships in the form of →concept systems;
- show the collocational and syntactic relationships of different →terms in texts;
- serve as the source of examples for the →dictionary.

Moreover, only authentic texts make it possible to decide which →terms suggested in →dictionaries are really used by specialists and which are just literal translations coined by →lexicographers.

For a person who is not a specialist in the subject matter parallel texts are a shortcut to getting background information. Even if specialists in the particular field are used as a source of information, the compiler of the →dictionary also has to know the field really well. One of the tools we use to encourage students to get acquainted with their study fields is to request them to write a comparative description of the state-of-the-art and characteristics of the subject in Finland and in Russia. Every piece of information is accompanied with a reference to allow for further checks.

3.3 Experts

Experts in the special field covered by the →dictionary are also necessary in terminological research. Moreover, this pertains both to source and target languages. Experts are needed, firstly, for consultations about the characteristics of →concepts. Secondly, they are necessary in helping to coin new →terms or rather suggestions for →terms: they know which →concepts and →terms already exist. They can also judge how successful different suggestions for formulating foreign →terms would be: would they give the right impression of the semantic features of →concepts, how would they sound, would they have unexpected connotations, etc.

Good →terms for foreign →concepts can also be found in translations. For this purpose, translations are not “forbidden” for the compilers of →dictionaries. But also translations have to be viewed critically and their expressions checked with people who are both native speakers of the target language, and experts in the subject matter.

4 Conclusion

An ideal →dictionary compiler would be a perfectly bilingual person who had received an education in a certain special field in two different countries and languages and who in addition would have the logical mind and the special knowledge of a professional terminologist. Because such people hardly exist, other ways of compiling a →dictionary have to be found. In any case, a →dictionary compiler has to get to know the special field as well as possible. The best sources of information are parallel texts in both languages and experts in the particular special field representing both of the languages and societies involved.

The biggest problems in compiling a terminological dictionary are connected with conceptual differences between languages, which manifest themselves in non-equivalent or non-existing →terms. Conceptual differences are partly based on differences between the cultures and societies involved. Consequently, it is natural that there should be big differences between Russian and Finnish forest →terminologies.

Making a good →dictionary is a laborious task, quite different from the layman's ideas of "translating the words". However, good →dictionaries are important in improving the quality of translations and thus making international communication easier and more fruitful.

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