TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TERMINOLOGY WORK IN COMPARATIVE ADULT EDUCATION

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The problematic nature of translation only becomes apparent when the transfer of meaning obviously fails and communication is prevented. Probably everyone who has stayed in another country and language region has experienced failed communication in the form of misunderstandings in situations of daily life. The Babylonian language chaos creates barriers to communication.

But experts also experience this learning process regarding the practical implications of the problems of translation and terminology in a professional context of an international seminar or during a research trip. Research work on adult education in other countries is always accompanied by translation mistakes which often impede technical communication. Starting from our own understanding of "adult education" which is shaped by our own national structures in adult education, we translate the term literally and assume that the term has the same contents. If we are lucky the misunderstanding will soon be cleared up as we carry on talking and the reasons for the unsuccessful communication will become obvious.

The success of technical communication in an international context depends on translation. Increasing internationalization and in particular the of unification in Europe raise the question of the status of the transfer of meaning and the act of translating with a new urgency.

Translation-orientated work in the field of terminology represents a desideratum of research in adult education. Up to now it has mainly been conducted by supranational organisations; UNESCO in particular has made endeavours in the field of international language standardization (cf. Titmus et al. 1979). Against the backdrop of the European process of integration, work in the field of multilingual terminology in adult education is becoming more urgent all the time. This is verified by the terminologies which have been published recently (cf. CEFEDOP 1996). However, they are restricted in the main to vocational training, because this is where business and politics generate a mounting call for a standardization of terminology in Europe.

Every examination of adult education in another language and culture area is to a particular extent confronted with the problems of translation and terminology.

Tools for Translation: Multilingual Terminologies and Glossaries

Attempts by international organizations so far to draw up multilingual terminologies and thesauri for adult education reveal the imminent difficulties in finding the respective equivalent in the foreign language. The existing multilingual terminologies are often incomplete and have not kept pace with
the general expansion and the shift in the meaning of terms which has taken place, especially in the field of continuing vocational training (cf. European Office for Adult Education 1980). There is also the fact that they are principally restricted to the English- and French-speaking areas.

One new tool for translation is the multilingual terminological database "Eurodicautom" of the European Commission's Translation Service. It was initially developed to assist in-house translators, but it can now be consulted by everybody through the World Wide Web (www.echo.lu/edic). This data-base contains more than 5 million entries - technical terms, abbreviations, acronyms and phraseology - in twelve languages. It is particularly helpful in the case of less widely-used languages.

All work in the field of multilingual terminology is faced with the "misery"of translation. This problem requires a brief reflection. Up to now it has mainly been applied linguists who have dealt with issues of technical terminology and translation. I will refer to some of the central results of their work in the following, with a strong emphasis on the practical consequences for comparative research in adult education.

**Problems of Translation and Terminology**

The layperson usually imagines that sound knowledge of the source and target language and - just in case - a good dictionary are adequate initial requirements. These are indeed a conditio sine qua non but are in no way sufficient in technical translating. An extended concept of translation must be taken as the starting point.

In the discussion from the point of view of the science of translation the term "equivalence" plays a central role. It expresses the correspondence of pairs of terms from the source and target language as far as their contents are concerned. The functional equivalence of terms is aimed for. So the act of translation doesn't mean carrying out a word-for-word translation of terms from the source language into the target language; rather the contents of the terms must be transferred. The translation process is concerned with achieving functional equivalence between two terms. There are various degrees of equivalence. Here four different cases are taken as ideal types which can be represented graphically as follows (see table 1) (cf. Arntz, Picht 1991, p. 160):

**Table 1: Degrees of equivalence between two terms**

1. Complete conceptual equivalence

2. Parial equivalence, overlapping
3. Inclusion; a term merges into another

4. No conceptual equivalence

The postulated ideal typical equivalence, one-to-one correspondence, can hardly ever be achieved in practice. Because unambiguous definitions are almost impossible, an unbridgeable gap between the source and language will usually remain.

Because the meaning of a term can only be worked out completely from the context, it is always a case of interpretative translation, based on interpretations and judgements. Translating represents a process of problem which there is a great variety of possible interpretations. Finding an adequate translation, therefore, usually also means getting to the "heart of the matter". The reverse is also true: a lack of conceptual clarity often indicates understanding of the research object.

The real problem of translation results from the ambiguity of terms. Here there is, for example, the danger that "interference" occurs, i.e. that contents overlap because of the similarity of language structures. Lexical interference is often termed faux amis (false friends) in the relevant literature, because one is encouraged to draw false analogies. For example an American high school is by no means comparable to a German Hochschule, although there is a strong similarity between the names. In some cases word-for-word translations suggest understanding without it actually being achieved.

**Problems of Translating Adult Education Terminology**

I want to illustrate the complex nature of translation using some terms of English, German, French and Spanish adult education as examples.

The translation of everyday vocabulary, technical and descriptive terms of adult education in another language does not cause any great methodological difficulties. From evening class (Clase nocturna/ Cours du soir) via distance learning (Ensenanza a distancia) and language laboratory (Laboratorio de idiomas) to certificate (Certificado) linguistic equivalents can certainly be found with the aid of dictionaries or multilingual terminological databases. It becomes evident that it is terms of adult education which include complex realities which represent pitfalls - and are therefore of interest here - i.e. the terms relating to the philosophy of adult education (popular education, adult education, continuing education, civic education, community education etc.), the terms relating to the organization (formal, non-formal adult education, non-governmental organizations, social initiatives, study leave etc.) and expressions for institutions.

There is, for example, the Spanish term "Educacion Popular" which could be translated in German as "Volksbildung". However, the German term refers to a different period from a socio-historical point of view. Therefore, the translated term "Volksbildung" certainly does not have the same meaning as the Spanish term "Educacion Popular". This in turn has different characteristics in Latin America to those in Spain which makes it even more difficult to distinguish the concept. You will search in vain for a
direct counterpart to the German term "Politische Bildung" in many other countries. Although in the
terminology edited by the European Office for Adult Education (1980) the English term "Citizenship
education" and the French term "Education civique" are named, it can be doubted whether those are
equivalent. Because the German concept of Politische Bildung, "includes not only civic studies, but
also provision dealing with social problems and the relationship of the individual to society; seminars
on the representation of employees' interests within companies are also part of political
education." (Nuissl 1994, p. 53)

Furthermore, because the present structures of adult education and training in a country are the
result of a longer socio-historical process (and therefore sometimes completely different) they make
it more difficult to find equivalent concepts in the source and target language.

Finally, I must also mention the difficulty of translating the expressions for institutions. On the one
hand, some types of institutions cannot be found directly in other countries (e.g. Folk High School or
"Heimvolkshochschulen"). Here equivalents from a functional point of view must be sought. On the
other hand, the transfer of the expression used for similar institutions (e.g. "Universidad popular";
"Universite populaire" and "Volkshochschule") and organization forms (Study circle and circulo de
estudio) comprises the danger of blurring differences between the institutions.

The problem of translation is a dual one in every way because it concerns two different systems of
languages and concepts respectively. A further problem is that of a lack of conceptual clarity and the
dynamism of the development of concepts in both countries. As a glance at the situation in Germany
shows, there is firstly no complete terminological consensus in the field of continuing education in a
national context, and there cannot be one due to the complexity of the subject. Secondly, the
meanings of terms change in time, due to legislation, for example. These changes are especially true
for countries in transition. Due to the countries' accelerated process of change a rapid differentiation
of the technical terminology of adult education has taken place. This strong dynamism within a short
period of time led to many new terms being included in the technical terminology but older ones
were not replaced by them; one result is the co-existence of competing terms. The act of translating
therefore requires knowledge of the terminology process in the source country. Without knowledge
of the context, adequate technical translations are not possible.

Implications for the Methodology of Translation

The examples given above show the size of the problems of translation and emphasize the
importance of systematic work in the field of terminology. In my opinion, if knowledge is actually to
be gained in the field of adult education, three requirements should be made of this work: 1.
embedding in the context, 2. emphasis of differences and 3. transfer work.

Add 1.

The meanings of terms can often only be worked out when the terms are considered in context.
Translations must therefore attempt to make the "location" of terms easier. The knowledge of the context which is often needed in addition can be supplied by amplifications in the text (footnotes) or separately in appendices (glossaries).

If one checks the glossaries of the country-studies on France (Liebl 1991), Germany (Nuissl 1994) and Spain (Jutte 1992) published by the German Institute for Adult Education it becomes obvious that only limited aids to comprehension can be given in the appendix. A direct comparison of the explanation in the glossary of the French term "Education populaire", the Spanish "Educacion popular" and the German "Volksbildung" reveals the entries:

* Education populaire: "Traditional field of education outside school which has been strongly leisure-orientated since 1936. It is generally backed by associations".

* Educacion popular: "Stands mainly for the Latin American concept of adult education. The influence of P Freire in the seventies was extremely important in Spain".

* Volksbildung: "the term used for continuing education up to the end of the Second World War; refers particularly to the liberal bourgeois tradition of general education".

It appears that the necessary knowledge of the context can be given more effectively through explanations in the text or in footnotes. I would like quote a note on the Italian term "associazione" by Apitzsch (1990, p. 85) as, in my opinion, a successful example:

"The word 'associazione' can perhaps be translated into German by the word 'Vereinigung' but really there is no German equivalent for it. It does not express what is meant by the German 'Vereinswesen', the privatistic following of particular leisure purposes, but the self-governed structuring of the central cultural needs of the majority of the population. The term which co closest to 'associazionismo' is probably 'Assoziation' as Marx and Engels used it in their 'Deutschen Ideologie', where a 'community with others' is mentioned in which every individual has the means to 'develop his talents in all directions'.'"

Add 2.

Here the methodological requirement that differences be emphasized is fulfilled. The "difference method" should become a decisive principle in work in the field of terminology: not common features but differences should be emphasized. With work in the field of terminology up to now there is an obvious danger that common features and similarities are stressed and that terms are standardized. This procedure does not seem appropriate for research in continuing education, because differences between concepts are rashly levelled out. For the sake of the precision of terms
and above all to avoid drawing false analogies it is necessary to work contrastively.

This could require coining new words in one's own language which follow the original terms in order to avoid drawing false analogies. These new expressions also act as a signal to the reader by drawing attention to the dangers of pseudo understanding. In such a case the terms of the source language should be given when the new expression is introduced. Another way to avoid drawing false analogies is just to keep the original term untranslated (cf. Reischmann 1997).

Add 3.

Another method could be called the "transfer method", when a further translation step is undertaken regarding the contents. This is an additional abstraction step by the author: functional equivalents are located in the respective cultural context and shown. As an example for this method I give the transfer of the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal adult education to the situation in Germany (cf. Knoll 1996, p. 6):

Formal adult | Non-formal adult | Informal adult
-------------|-----------------|------------------
education    | education       | education
-------------|-----------------|------------------
Profiles: Qualification-orientated | Non-vocational, (which Alternative, non-education, continuing is not qualification- institutionalized adult | education, further orientated) socio- education | training, retraining cultural education

Usually, though, after "linguistic" translation has taken place, readers will have to conduct this further "factual" translation step themselves.

Other significant transfer work can be done by quoting the results of supranational organisations or reconstructing debates carried out in other countries, for example when the American discussion on self-directed learning is summarized in Germany (Reischmann 1997).
**Requirements for Research in Adult Education**

First of all, the issue of translation and terminology must be understood not just as a pragmatic but also as a methodological problem. As such it deserves greater attention.

Due to increased international, especially European, co-operation in education the importance of multilingual terminologies will increase, but at the same time the work done so far can be seen as insufficient. Therefore, research in adult education which is committed to internationality must see itself required to intensify this area.

A step in this direction is the increased acknowledgement of the work done by supranational organizations in the field of theories and terminologies for continuing education (UNESCO, Council of Europe, Commission of the European Community etc.). Adult education in some countries, like in Germany, often represents a "special case" in the international context as far as its terms are concerned. A certain national self-absorption is obvious. The theories and recommendations of international organisations are hardly ever recognized, although they often don't contradict the national ones. Here I don't mean taking on the results of work by supranational organisations initially, but acknowledging them. They could, therefore, take on the role of the tertium comparationis and thus promote international understanding.

To make it quite clear: I don't want to speak out in favour of a standardization of the technical terminology of continuing education. The tendency which can be detected for English to become the Lingua franca in the international context often makes technical communication easier but it doesn't solve the deeper problems of translation. Knowledge of the source language remains necessary for comparative studies. Competence in the subject cannot in this case be separated from linguistic competence.

An important pre-requisite for international specialist communication is the further development of one's own national system of terms. Drawing up a specialist dictionary of terms is an important desideratum of research. Here it is less important to establish a nomenclature of adult education than to continually strive to make central terms more precise.

The problems of translation and terminology should be taken into account in higher education, for example by promoting the reception of international discussions on theory, by encouraging the student to learn a foreign language and by carrying out field study trips to gain insight into adult education in other countries. Despite all the efforts of the work in the field of translation it cannot replace direct contact with adult educationalists in other countries. Mutual visits and research fill the terms with meaning, make the reality described in theoretical terms easier to grasp.
References


