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THE SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF TERMS, WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THE PHENOMENON OF POLYSEMY WITHIN SPECIALIST LANGUAGES[1]

1. Introduction

In this paper I set out to examine the problems of monosemy and polysemy within specialist languages, primarily within the language of economics. I review the criteria set for terms, define the ideal term and examine the various types of deviations from the ideal term and the reasons for these deviations. I also lay special emphasis on the phenomena of polysemy and synonymy within specialist languages, the interaction between the specialised and standard meanings of terms and the analysis of terms with multiple specialised meanings. I explore the impact of these phenomena on professional terminology: resulting in the disappearance of certain meanings and thus the emergence of new terms and term meanings in a particular professional terminology. I also apply my findings to the area of specialised translator training.

2. What is a term?

In this paper I do not wish to go all the way back to the issues discussed by Wüster (Wüster, 1979), who talks about the need to separate *Begriffe* ('concept') from *Benennungen* ('name') There are also further debates whether a term should be interpreted as *Bezeichnung* ('description') or *Benennung* ('name'). Reference to the various views on this can be found in Márta Fischer's PhD dissertation (Fischer 2010). Since the English expression LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) in my view is a wider term, I decided to translate the Hungarian word *szaknyelv* as *specialist language*.

First I intend to use a few examples in order to examine the various characteristics that make a lexeme a term. Ferenc Bakos defines terms in his *Idegen szavak és kifejezések kéziszótára* (A Concise Dictionary of Foreign Words and Expressions) (Bakos 1994) as follows: "terminus technicus: Lat. technical term for the exact denotation of a notion or an object".

Nyelvi fogalmak kisszótára (A Pocket Dictionary of Linguistic Terms) (Tolcsvai Nagy 2000) edited by Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy provides the following definition: "technical term (Lat. terminus technicus): word used in a particular form or meaning by a certain profession".

According to Janusz Bańczerowski (2004):

> The notion of a term is defined according to constant parameters. Consequently, a term is a word (collocation) that has a precisely defined notional structure, theoretically it is an explicit unit without any emotional charge and can be used in combinations to form structures. It should be added, however, that paradoxically science has so far been unable to come up with an exact definition for the word term. (Bańczerowski 2004: 447)

The definition of *term* by Ágota Fóris:

> A term consists of two parts. The first is the *nominator* (the *jel* or "sign" itself), which can be a lexeme consisting of one or more words (a combination of numbers and letters), a code or another sign. The second part is the *definition* that provides the distinctive features of the notion it represents. This is followed by a third part in the lexical definition: the *interpretation* necessary for the clear definition of a notion, together with additions and comments. (Fóris 2005: 34)

Fóris's definition of a term uses the expression "a lexeme consisting of one or more words". It should be stressed, however, that terms as lexemes can consist of *one or more components,* since this demonstrates the complex nature of terms more clearly and sheds light on certain characteristics of term creation in a more precise manner.

Dosca lists the following examples regarding German legal terms (Dosca 2005: 67):

1. 1-component terms: *Richter, Gericht, Gesetz, Senat, Vergütung, Berater, Sicherheit, Gewalt, Freiheit, Ordnung, Verfassung, Regelung, Vorschrift, Verteidiger, Vertreter, Anwalt* etc.

2. 2-component terms: *Gerichtshof, Richteramt, Bundestag, Bundesrat, Strafverfolgung, Haftbefehl, Gesetzgebung, Rechtsanwalt, Rechtspflege, Meinungsfreiheit* etc.
3. 3-component terms: *Bundesverfassungsgericht, Bundeskriminalamt, Geschäftsbesorgungsvertrag, Bundesgebührenordnung, Landesjustizverwaltung, Fernmeldegeheimnis, Bundeswehrverwaltung* etc.
4. 4-component terms: *Bundesverfassungsgerichtsgesetz, Bundesrechtsanwaltordnung, Gesetzgebungsnotstand* etc.

The analysis of compound technical terms reveals that in many cases one part of the compound is a standard term and only the special meaning of the other part, the "real" term makes the compound a technical term. Examples for this from the economic terminology: *árfolyam* ('exchange rate'), *árképzés* ('price formation'), *költségalap* ('cost basis') etc. Heltai distinguishes terms from standard words according to the following characteristics (Heltai 2004):

1. terms have one meaning and have no synonyms;
2. terms usually lack connotation and emotional meaning;
3. terms have a meaning based on an exact definition;
4. the definition of the meaning is based on the subordination and superiority of the meanings denoted by the term;
5. terms are always used with the same meaning, they cannot be extended or narrowed down: they are independent of the context and the pragmatic factors, and the meaning often relies on quantitative parameters; the meanings of the different terms are clearly separated, without transitions;
6. terms are only used by certain groups of the speech community in certain professional fields or for certain activities.

When examining the relationship between terms and realia, Klaudy makes the following observations on terms (Klaudy 2015):

The term
1. is a descriptive technical denotation of a notion or an object
2. is only used by a limited number of professionals in the source and target languages
3. has no alternatives when translated, because it has to be used consistently
4. needs to be translated and it already has or will have a target language equivalent at all times

5. is most commonly used in scientific/technical literature
6. is not or loosely connected to national traditions
7. survives for a long time
8. often has its origins in another language: Latin, Greek, English
9. has a denotation which is not tangible, but notional instead
10. is practical, used to understand and build the present and the future
11. is sometimes difficult to identify, because some language users may use a word as a term, which also has a meaning for others, but only in the standard language
12. is primarily researched in the field of specialist language research and terminology
13. should be taught as part of special subject courses.

The primarily aim of the above classification is to help identify source language terms and realia, and distinguish them from each other, therefore some of its characteristics are not relevant for us. However, in terms of our future findings, we should highlight Point 11, which describes the polysemic nature of terms.

Dobos (2008: 95) summarises the characteristics of legal terms in the following table:

Aspects	LEGAL TERMS	STANDARD WORDS
meaning	exact definition, not a prototype	in most cases it has no explicit definition, based on a prototype
polysemy	not applicable	generally applicable
synonymy	not applicable	generally applicable
emotional meaning, connotation	not applicable	generally applicable (often dominant)
subordination and superiority	the definition of the meaning is based on the subordination and superiority of the meanings denoted by the term	not always identifiable
transition between meanings	the meanings of legal terms are clearly separated, without transitions; the definition of the meanings often relies on quantitative parameters	possible
context	meaning is often independent from the context	meaning is often dependent on the context
pragmatic factors	meaning cannot be modified, terms are always used with the same meaning	meaning can be modified, usually extended or narrowed down

interpretation of the meaning	individual or occasional interpretation of the meaning is not allowed	individual or occasional interpretation of the meaning is possible
use	certain groups of the speech community, some terms are used by larger social groups	entire speech community

Table 1. Comparison of Legal Terms and Standard Words
according to Semantic and Pragmatic Aspects

According to Wüster, terms must fulfil the criteria of *Eindeutigkeit* ('unambiguousness') and *Eineindeutigkeit* ('complete unambiguousness') (Wüster 1974). The former means that a name can only refer to one notion (but several names can be used for the same notion, therefore it allows synonymy in specialist languages), while the latter categorically excludes it, which means that only one name can be used for one notion and this name can only refer to this particular notion.

When reviewing the criteria for terms, Fischer focuses on the criterion of content accuracy, namely the existence of an exact definition for a particular term. Heltai also focuses on this criterion when saying that: "the crucial difference probably lies in the fact that the meaning of terms can be defined clearly, while the meaning of standard words cannot" (Heltai 2004: 25).

Apart from the above it must also be noted that there are significant differences in language use even within a particular specialist language. The various specialist language communication forms have their own rules and regularities, allowing us to differentiate certain levels or layers within these specialist languages. The same content in the various communication levels of a professional field or within the subunits of specialist language structures may be expressed by different linguistic tools, the choice of which, apart from conventional phrases, mainly depends on the communicative purpose, the information to be communicated, the knowledge of the addressee and the linguistic strategy. (Dobos 2004: 28)

Constantinovits and Vladár (2008) use the following table to illustrate the communication forms at the various communication levels within the language of economics:

Language use area:	Style	Forms and products
1. economics	scientific, written	scientific literature, technical books
2. economic texts (documents)	official, written	contracts, instructions, regulations, directives
3. actual communication	verbal	negotiation, information transfer
4. media	journalistic	article, interview, advert
5. lay, everyday	standard language, verbal	opinion, dialogue

Table 2. Typology of Economic Performance by Language Use Areas
(after Ablonczyné 2006; Constantinovits–Vladár 2008: 390)

In my opinion, the above classification needs to be fine-tuned, because it suggests that the somewhat awkwardly named "actual communication" category only includes verbal forms of communication. According to the above table business correspondence (requests for quote, quotes, orders, order confirmations, complaints, etc.) would belong to the 2nd category, however, many of their elements should be classified together with negotiations and information transfer. Verbal communication in the field of economics theory (for example university lectures, seminar discussions, even professional debates and discussions following conference presentations, etc.) is also missing from this table. On the other hand, the table clearly illustrates a relevant phenomenon, which is the different (wider, narrower) semantic domain of terms used on the various levels of a certain specialist language.

When we look at the meanings of the lexeme *piac* (market), we find the following: As a term, its economic definition is: *The market is the system of actual and potential sellers and buyers and their exchange, consisting of key elements such as demand, supply, price and income.* An example for its use in corporate communication: *A market must be found for the new product.* (Narrowed meaning: here it only means the demand and the range of potential buyers, maybe coupled with the related geographical area, such as *European* v. *Asian trading area,* etc.). An example for its use in standard communication: *Tomorrow I am going to the market to buy some fish.* (Narrowed meaning: a specific street or square, perhaps a hall in a town or village, where agricultural produce and products for household use are sold.)

When discussing the characteristics of terms, Heltai states that they only help us to come up with a rough distinction between terms and standard vocabulary elements, because a lot of standard words have only one meaning or a neutral connotation (e.g. *typewriter, Wednesday)* and not all terms are monosemic (Heltai 2004). Here we should not only consider the meaning of a term within a particular specialist language, because it can belong to several professional terminologies (Heltai for example mentions the medical and biological meanings of the term *sterile* adding that the synonym of *sterile* as a medical term is *germ-free*). As shown above, different (wider or narrower) meanings of a term can be used by theoretical and applied sciences; what's more, many terms can belong to standard and professional terminologies at the same time. A good example is the lexeme *Ház* ('House') in the phrase *"Tisztelt Ház!"* ('Honourable House'), which can also be regarded as a proper noun as a term, referring to the national assembly or sometimes as a legislative body, as opposed to the standard meaning of the word (see Bańczerowski, Bárdosi 2004).

Based on the above, the ideal term can be defined as follows:

A term is a (simple or complex) lexeme, code or other sign, which gives the exact definition of a notion or object within a certain specialist field; in other words, it has one clearly definable and constant meaning within the communication of language users of the same level in a particular specialist area, it is not characterised by ambiguity (the meaning is not underspecified), it can be used in combinations to form structures and it usually lacks connotation and emotional meaning.

The meaning of the lexeme described here may be extended or narrowed down, according to the different levels of language use within a particular specialist area, but its basic meaning is clearly identifiable even in these cases. Such a lexeme may appear in the language use of another specialist area as a different term, furthermore, as a standard word it can have one or more meanings that are different from its meaning as a specialist language term, also it can have connotations and some emotional charge. These functions, however, are clearly distinguishable from the above function of the term.

Based on the above definition, the Hungarian lexeme *ár* (price) has four clearly distinguishable meanings as a term, plus it is also part of the standard lexis:

1. (economy) A value which would purchase a product or service.
2. (leathercraft) A small pointed tool used for piercing holes, especially in leather.

3. (printing) An instrument used for separating or lifting out types during type-setting. (Similarly shaped to the tool used in leathercraft).
4. (unit of area) Equal to 100 square metres (symbol: a).
5. (standard word): flowing body of water, flood

In the case of two different specialist language terms (2 and 3 – 'tool, instrument') the diachronic analysis of the terms could be necessary, given the similar shapes of the objects. It should also be noted that the 1st meaning is widely used in standard language, used in such standard language phrases as *He will pay the price for that or He felt the price of the wheat in his pocket.* The semantic analysis of these, however, falls outside of the scope of this paper.

3. Non-ideal phenomena – polysemy, synonymy

Monosemy plays a key role in the study of specialist language characteristics. First of all it should be mentioned that due to the differences between the various subject areas, it is very difficult to identify general rules and characteristics for the so-called *specialist languages*. Heltai also mentions that the lexical and semantic features of specialist languages largely depend on the area of science they represent, furthermore, similarly to the standard language, due to their internal segmentation and the various situations in their usage, it is difficult to identify general rules for the specialist languages (Heltai 1988). Heltai brings several examples for polysemy and synonymy in specialist English terms. His contrastive analysis proves that these characteristics may cause several problems during professional translation.

According to Heltai, a significant part of terms is polysemic[2]. He identifies the following relationships between the standard meaning of a word and the meaning of the same word when used as a term (Heltai 2004):

1. Total separation: Two clearly different meanings, one does not influence the other significantly (e.g. *jóság* ('goodness') in standard language and ('goodness-of-fit') in mathematics);
2. Partial separation: The two meanings are clearly distinguishable, but they influence each other in certain contexts; the standard meaning sometimes takes on

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2 In his view the simultaneous existence of standard and specialised meanings of a term should not be considered as homonymy.

the main component(s) of the term's meaning, while the term may also take on certain elements of the standard meaning (e.g. *cukor* ('sugar'), where the meaning of *szénhidrát* ('carbohydrate') starts to appear as a standard meaning);

3. Dominance of the term's meaning: The standard meaning is determined by the term's meaning; the difference is that the former contains less information and another meaning also emerges (polysemy development), the emotional charge is stronger, e.g. *atom* ('atom');

4. Dominance of the standard meaning: The term's meaning is based on the standard meaning, there is basically no point in distinguishing the two meanings.

Dobos differentiates real legal terms which only have a term's meaning and legal terms which also have a standard meaning. In case of the latter, when the standard meaning is the primary meaning, Dobos forms four groups (Dobos 2008):

1. the legal and the standard meanings are identical
2. the legal meaning can be deducted from the standard meaning
3. the standard meaning is used as a metaphor in legal terminology
4. there is no semantic link between the legal and the standard meanings

She notes, however, that the language of law is characterised by the uniform use of terms.

When examining synonymy within the language of tourism, Enikő Terestyéni lists several examples, noting that the foreign form of the term is always part of the word forms (Terestyéni 2011):

1. attrakció (attraction) / vonzerő / látványosság / nevezetesség / jó hely
2. turizmus (tourism) / idegenforgalom
3. utazási ügynökség / utazási iroda / travel agency
4. utazásszervező / tour operátor / tour operator

When analysing the term *ökoturizmus* ('eco tourism'), she concludes that one of the reasons for specialist language synonymy is the following:

The definition of eco tourism clearly shows that it is defined differently by every professional, because all of them approach eco tourism from a different aspect and may even use a different name for it, which adds to or takes away from its meaning, making it very difficult to come to a consensus on the content behind the various definitions.

That is the reason for the abundance of terms used in the specialist language for this particular type of tourism.

ecotourism – adventure travel, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, nature (based) tourism, green travel or even cultural tourism. (Terestyéni 2011: 114)

My research in the language of economic law led me to conclude that there is a high degree of synonymy in the early stage, that is, during the emergence of a specialist language, which is significantly reduced later on.

This can be amply illustrated with the word *concursus* and its Hungarian equivalents: *öszvegyűlés; csődület; pályázás; csődülés; toldulás; öszvejövetel; egybejövetel, népség, sokaság; gyűlés, öszvejövés, tudományos remeklés, sokadalom; öszvefutás; öszvetódulás v. futás v. gyűlés; csőd, pályázat*, taken from the *Törvénytudományi Műszótár* (Dictionary of Jurisprudence) (1847).

Modern dictionaries list the term *csőd* (bankruptcy) as the equivalent of *Konkurs* with the above meaning. Some terms completely disappeared from our vocabulary, while others have become determonologised and continue to exist within the standard language with a different meaning.

The phenomenon of borrowing foreign expressions, shown in the above examples from the language of tourism, is not unusual in specialist languages. Bańczerowski also talks about this:

[…] lexical borrowing from foreign languages is interpreted differently in relation to the literary language and the technolects. It is not preferred in the literary language, especially when there is an equivalent in our language, however, in many techolects such lexical duplicates are considered as the norm under the recommendation of the International Standard Organization. (Bańczerowski 2004: 1)

Ginter demonstrates this phenomenon of borrowing with an example from the language of engineering (*tirisztor – thyristor*), while also discussing the issue of polysemy in specialist languages:

There are endless options for internal word creation; at the same time we see that the language of engineering likes to borrow from the existing vocabulary and simply increases the polysemy of words. [...] These phenomena in word use, however, do not make these technical texts ambiguous because they are descriptive. (Ginter 1988: 392)

In Ginter's view, polysemy in specialist languages does not hinder the interpretation, due to the non-ambiguous nature of the context. He thinks that the problem lies in the creation of neologisms, which then will only be used by a small circle. At the same time, the above example of the term *csőd* (bankruptcy) demonstrates a clear preference for monosemy during the development of specialist languages.

4. Changes in professional terminology

An interesting example for determinologisation, due to the preference for monosemy, is the changes in the meaning of the terms *merény* ('bravado'), *merénylő* ('assassin'). These were created during the reform of the specialist language (in the mid-1830s) from the German words *Unternehmung, Unternehmer.* The basis of the word family is *merény,* consisting of *mer* ('merészel') ('dares') + *ény* (deverbative nominal suffix). Around the same time, however, the words *merény* and *merénylet* were started to be used as the Hungarian equivalents of *Wagestück* and *Attentat,* although initially the word *merészlet* was also used in the standard language. Due to the preference for specialist language monosemy, the words *merény* and *merénylő* gradually lost their meaning as terms, but survived in the standard language. In the term's meaning they were replaced by *vállalkozás* ('enterprise'), *vállalkozó* ('entrepreneur'), referring to the bravery and risk-taking elements of these activities, and these terms remained to be actively used elements of our professional terminology. The preference for monosemy, therefore is one of the key motivations in the birth and disappearance of terms.

The opposite of determinologisation is the process called terminologisation, when a standard word becomes a term, namely it is integrated in the given terminology system and takes on a clear definition. The phenomenon of terminologisation within legal terminology is also discussed by B. Kovács. In his view, however, due to the semantic changes within the word, two groups should be distinguished (B. Kovács 1995: 61–62):

1. The word – sometimes the expression – is borrowed from the standard language with the same meaning (e.g. *adós* 'debtor');
2. The word – sometimes the expression – is borrowed from the standard language with a different meaning:
    A) with the narrowing of meaning (e.g. *egyezség* 'agreement', *kezesség* 'guarantee', *tulajdon* 'ownership');
    B) with the expansion of meaning (e.g. *parázna* 'fornicator').

Naturally, these changes take time, which means that in a given time period one lexeme may have a standard and a specialist language meaning as well.

5. The semantic analysis of terms in specialised translator training

Instead of a summary, I would like to continue by discussing the role that the semantic analysis of terms can play in translator training. At Eszterházy Károly University, the first semester of the specialised translator training programme is devoted to the introduction to the theory of terminology, followed by two semesters of terminology seminars: in the third semester we offer a course on economic, while in the fourth semester in legal terminology.

One of the elements of the terminology course is the so-called terminology data sheet, which is used for the analysis of terms from technical texts in Hungarian.
The data sheet has the structure shown in Table 3 below.

[TERM]	[SUBJECT]
Grammatical characteristics:	
Definition:	**Source of the definition:**
Conceptual network: (higher/lower notions; synonyms, antonyms; additional meanings, if any, in this case: specialist language/standard language; permanent collocations, compounds)	
Foreign language equivalents (the level of equivalence is shown by a sign before the expression)[4]:	
EN:	**DE:**
Context (examples):	
HU:	**EN/DE:**
Note:	

Table 3. Data sheet

Students find this data sheet very interesting and useful. For example, when analysing the previously discussed term *vállalkozó* ('entrepreneur'), the students also understood that the noun *vállalkozó* in itself is not part of the economic law terminology. We also examined the changes in a term's meaning due to socio-economic changes.

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3 full equivalence: =; partial equivalence: ±; no equivalence: ~

Definition:	Source of the definition:
a) A natural or legal person, who takes on a work on a **professional** basis.	
b) (trade, economics, before 1945) <in capitalism> a natural or legal person, businessman, who sets up, organises and manages a business by usually using their own capital.	Bárczi G., Országh L. (1959–1962): *A magyar nyelv értelmező szótára I–VII.* Budapest: Akadémiai.
A person **taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.**	*Tudományos és Köznyelvi Szavak Magyar Értelmező Szótára (www.meszotar.hu)*
(Private) entrepreneur: A person engaged in independent business activity that is being carried out on a regular basis, for profit by taking business risks.	*Act CXV of 2009 on Private Entrepreneurs and Sole Proprietorships.*

Table 4. Data sheet for *vállalkozó*

The term *vállalkozó* cannot be found in itself in the above law, while the term *egyéni vállalkozó* is included in the text 195 times. Based on the legal definition, the meaning of the term *üzletszerűen* is clear ('on a regular basis, for profit, by taking business risks'), which clearly demonstrates that the definition in the online *Tudományos és Köznyelvi Szavak Magyar Értelmező Szótára* (Hungarian Monolingual Dictionary of Scientific and Standard Words) is not accurate.

Such analyses are very useful for future specialised translators from a different aspect, namely that they learn to be very careful when using the available sources later during their work. They also find it very interesting to follow the changes in the meaning of a term. Using the above example, point b) of the definition in the dictionary finalised in 1962 lists a meaning under a separate entry called 'in capitalism', which is clearly influenced by the economic regime of the time. Specialised translators always have to keep such changes in mind in order to be able to select the right target language equivalent of a source language term.

During the completion of the terminology data sheet it is also important to position a particular term within a system, for example by listing antonyms (*kereslet – kínálat* ('demand' – 'supply'): in the case of the latter noting that *Angebot* could mean both). Similarly, looking up the synonyms and their equivalents is also useful, for example in the case of the term *vásár* ('fair'), it can be added to the Note section that the German equivalent *Messe* is used with the meaning 'mise' ('mass') in standard language (the historic links can also be discussed here).

Obviously, future specialised translators must also learn to use the available term extraction programmes, term bases and other term management functions of the CAT-tools. These are also covered by our course. I believe that working with terminology data sheets can be extremely beneficial, because it helps students become confident when using various terms and thus help them produce better translations.

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