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SECONDARY TERM FORMATION AND TERM STABILITY IN GENETICS: AN ENGLISH-SPANISH CORPUS STUDY

Abstract: This research analyzed a set of representative terms in the field of Genetics, all of which have multiple and competing correspondences in Spanish. Based on the results obtained, seven secondary term formation strategies were identified, and possible reasons were given for implementing one instead of the other in different contexts. The results obtained indicate that factors that lead to the use of one strategy over the others include expediency, the desire for semantic transparency, and the morphology of the target language. In this regard, the knowledge level of the target language users was also found to motivate the choice of target language correspondence.

Keywords: Term formation; Genetics; Domain loss, Term stability.

1. Introduction

In science and technology, research findings must be rapidly disseminated. The most effective way to communicate new discoveries to the international community is to employ a global language that everyone can understand. In today's world, the language used for this purpose is English. In fact, over the years English has become the language of science and the "de facto" language of communication for those who wish their oral or written texts to travel beyond national boundaries.

This is certainly the case in international conferences where scientific and technical research findings are presented and discussed. These events are breeding grounds for temporary, self-contained cultures, specific of a certain professional group. The use of the same type of discourse and terminology affirms the speakers' membership in a certain profession or specialized field (industrial engineering, medicine, chemistry, genetics, etc.). Since the terminology represents the knowledge structures characteristic of the domain, the relation between specialized knowledge and the language used to express it is

very close. In fact, a mastery of scientific and technical language in a certain area is often perceived as being synonymous with a mastery of the knowledge designated by the terms.

This is not only true for individuals but also for language-cultures. Speaker communities in which cutting-edge research is performed and new scientific discoveries are made usually have the terms at their disposal to designate new knowledge. Generally speaking, languages such as English and Japanese are where primary term formation takes place. Precisely for this reason, English has an advantage over minority languages (e.g. Norwegian, Basque, Bulgarian, etc.), which must adopt some type of translation strategy and policy in order to assimilate and/or systematically create correspondences for newly coined scientific terms in English. All too often, secondary term formation occurs very quickly. This is particularly the case when the research was performed in a non-Anglophone country and the findings are disseminated in parallel in English and another language.

However, as observed by Tardy (Tardy 2004: 248), using English for research dissemination purposes in international research contexts has advantages as well as drawbacks. Although the use of English as a *lingua franca* enhances and facilitates information storage and retrieval, scientists from other countries often feel at a disadvantage when it comes to publishing their work. The prevalence of English, especially in relatively new scientific domains, such as Genetics, has had a significant impact on scientific discourse published in other languages. This is reflected at the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of specialized knowledge units and texts.

One of the most evident effects of the dominance of English means that it is often difficult to find high-level scientific research published in other languages. Scientists and engineers, even those who speak major languages (e.g. Spanish, German, Russian, Chinese), are aware that they must publish in English if they wish their work to be read by specialists in other countries. Not surprisingly, this has created a thriving market for the translation and revision of scientific and technical texts into English since few researchers wish to divulge the results of their studies to a limited readership. However, the dominant role of English in the transmission of research to the international scientific community is not exempt of negative consequences.

Swales (Swales 1997: 374) goes so far as to characterize English as a *Tyrannosaurus rex* that "gobbles up the other denizens of the academic linguistic grazing grounds". Similarly, Phillipson (Phillipson 2008: 251) suggests that there are grounds for referring to English as a *lingua frankensteinia*. Although English is generally marketed as being a language of international understanding, which foments the advancement of scientific knowledge, its exclusive use in certain disciplines can promote the marginalization of other languages (Phillipson 2008). This is reflected in the lack of terminology (or stable terminology) in other languages to designate specialized concepts originally created and named in English.

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