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Terminology work the Swedish way

Introduction

In my article I will present the language situation in Sweden and the Swedish Centre of Terminology TNC, the “hub” in Swedish terminology work for more than 65 years. Terminology work in Sweden is also performed in a systematic way by others: some public agencies and private companies handle their own terminology needs, but still in close contact with TNC. However, a new terminology market has evolved where other consultants than TNC are offering terminology services, and this will also be mentioned.

The language situation in Sweden

In its language policy of 2005, Riksdagen (the Swedish Parliament) decided that Swedish should be the main language of Sweden. However, in January 2008, the question of how this should be regulated by law is still being investigated. Swedish has for many years enjoyed an undisputed status as Sweden's main language, even though this position has never been officially sanctioned. Swedish has been used in all domains of society, for example, administration, justice and the political system, as well as all levels of the educational system, working life and culture. Other languages spoken in Sweden, among them Finnish, have had official endorsement of use in Sweden's government or have otherwise been used without in any way affecting the status of Swedish as the obvious first language of the nation.

It is also a fact that many other languages are spoken in Sweden, today as in the past. Labour migration since the 1950s and later other kinds of immigration, and EU requirements as a consequence of Sweden joining the EU in 1995 have had a strong influence on the language situation and awareness of language use in the country. Among the languages that were declared national minority languages about six years ago are Sami, Finnish and the latter's closely related variety Meänkielä. These languages have **always** been spoken on present Swedish territory. But now they became legally recognized, in harmony with EU legislative requirements. The other two now officially recognized minority languages, Yiddish and Romani, also have long traditions of use in-country.

Paradoxically, the position of the Swedish language in Sweden could theoretically find itself threatened by the legal status afforded to some of the country's minority languages if its status is not officially recognised in law. While it appears unlikely that this would be allowed to occur in practice, it remains to be seen whether the outcome of the ongoing discussions will put an end to such speculation.

What is really occurring though, is that the use of Swedish has been threatened or even replaced by the use of English in some domains and speech situations in the country. This is particularly true of the production of written treatises and papers in the natural and medical sciences in higher education and research, and, also increasingly, in companies engaged in

international business. While Swedish was taken for granted before, a perception has emerged that the choice of Swedish as the preferred language in various domains in-country might need attention and support.

So, in December 2005, Riksdagen (the Swedish Parliament) decided on a new language policy for Sweden, with four comprehensive goals:

1. Swedish is to be the main language in Sweden.
2. Swedish should be a complete language, i.e. be possible to use in all areas of society, serving and uniting our society
3. Swedish in official and public use shall be correct, simple and understandable.
4. Everyone shall have a right to language: to learn Swedish, to learn foreign languages, and to use one's mother tongue or minority language.

The new language policy also declares that measures shall be taken to ensure that Swedish terms and expressions can be generated in all those areas in which we want to be able to use Swedish and it is, of course, a necessary prerequisite for goal number two.

Terminology work in Sweden

The making of handbooks, grammars, glossaries, dictionaries and so on in support of Swedish has a long tradition. Olle Josephson,¹ the director of the Swedish Language Council, says that language cultivation acts – acts of Sprachpflege if we use the German word – in today's Swedish language community typically are informed by a "social" rather than a "cultural" ideal. The social ideal generates arguments that stress user-friendliness and aims at efficient communication between all citizens and residents on as equal terms as possible. Language cultivation from a cultural point of view focuses on the language, not its users, and rather strives to keep and develop a rich, multifaceted language with strong traditions and to promote an expressive, logical, and consistent language system on the foundation of its historical tradition.

The "social" ideal informed the establishment of a Swedish terminology centre. The first steps were taken in 1936, when a committee for nomenclature within the Academy of Engineering Sciences was established. Engineers, especially inventors and standardizers, took the initiative "to meet the growing need of an adequate terminology".² Five years later, in 1941, a permanent centre for technical terminology was established on the basis of the committee and with statutes laid down by the government. Its name became Tekniska nomenklaturcentralen (the Swedish Centre for **Technical** Terminology) and its acronym was TNC. In 2000, the TNC was reconstructed and the name was changed into Terminologikum TNC (The Swedish Centre for Terminology). The name was deliberately made more general in order to reflect the widening of the centre's activities. However, the acronym TNC was kept in order to emphasize the continuity of its activities.

Those gentlemen (yes, it was only *gentlemen!*) that founded the TNC were very far-sighted. Still today, more than 65 years later, we at the TNC agree with the primacy of the social ideal – and we look upon our work as "modern". Our attitude is very pragmatic, we solve

¹ Josephson, O. (2004) "Ju". *Ifrågasatta självklarheter om svenskan, engelskan och alla andra språk i Sverige*. Stockholm: Norstedts Ordbok. ISBN 91-7227-406-9

² Protokoll fört vid sammanträde med Nomenklaturkommittén, Kungl. Ingenjörsvetenskapsakademien den 15 januari 1936. (Minutes from a meeting with the Committee for nomenclature, Royal Academy of engineering sciences, January 15, 1936).

communication problems of specific user groups and it is natural to recognize the “social” way as the only feasible way. The needs and demands of doing this come from the roots of specialists’ need for an efficient communication. The measure of success, the result, of our work is satisfying their needs, and for that very same reason the result, the terminological outcome, implies agreement and acceptance. Without any normative prescription whatsoever, the agreement comes to serve as the norm for its particular user group. Thus, it is not because of directives from above but from a particular client group’s own felt needs that their terms become the norm, for them. This norm unifies usage in that network of users.

The new TNC is a private company. However, we still receive a government grant from the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications in order to function as the “hub” of Swedish terminological activities. The grant amounts to about 50 % of the annual turnover.

The main objective for TNC was and still is to meet all kinds of terminological needs that particular networks of practitioners in just about any field of work may have. In order to achieve this objective TNC:

- Offers terminological services and supports public agencies, organisations and companies that pursue terminological work
- Develops terminological products such as glossaries and termbanks
- Elaborates rules and guidelines for the writing of technical texts
- Collects, records and processes terminological information, e.g. new terms, old terms in a new context, conceptual information
- Offers lectures and courses on terminology and technical writing
- Cooperates with other language and terminology agencies, on both the national and international level
- Participates in international standardization within the framework of ISO and CEN

Cooperation networks

The other language cultivation agency in Sweden, the Swedish Language Council, is funded by the Ministry of Culture. The council attends to general language usage while TNC attends to languages for special purposes with a focus on terminology. The existence of two language cultivation agencies with different areas of responsibility has never been a problem in Sweden. Both agencies are engaged in a network of other language specialists’ institutions, e.g. the Swedish Academy, the language consultants in media (newspapers, radio and television), the language consultants in the Prime Minister's Office, the Swedish Standards Institute, etc. This network meets four times a year for mutual exchange of information; also for discussing language policy matters and certain fundamental language or term issues.

Another cooperation, very important for TNC, is the Nordic network Nordterm³. Nordic cooperation in terminology has existed since the 40’s, and the Nordterm network which was established in 1976 has slightly formalized the cooperation. It was established as a result of initiatives from the agencies themselves. Nordterm is not an independent legal entity and has no funding on its own but may apply funding for certain projects.

TNC’s terminology production

The terminological projects that were assigned to TNC during its first years of existence in the

³ The Nordic countries are: Denmark, Faeroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

40's, resulted in glossaries in different technical fields, for example Glossary of founding, Glossary of enameling, Glossary of strength of materials and Glossary of house painting terms. The focus was to delimit and describe concepts within one subject field at a time (or area of specialized practice) in Swedish, reflecting the Swedish conceptual world, and also to give equivalents in other Nordic languages, often also in English, German and French.

The scientific base for TNC's terminology work was well described by the first director of TNC, John Wennerberg. He held a doctorate in electrotechnical engineering and also had a profound knowledge of linguistics. Incidentally, he was acquainted with Eugen Wüster and like Wüster, he regarded the concept as in principle independent of the language expression and explained why it was practical to distinguish between objects in the real world, concepts and terms and definitions. He stated: "Terminology work has two sides, to sanction appropriate terms and to lay down their meaning."⁴

The purpose of TNC's early terminology production was to meet communication needs that came about due to industrialization, standardization and internationalization which took place at that time all over the Western world. The initiators were experts themselves who very often represented not only one company or one organizational body, but the entire subject field or trade.

In the 60's, terminological projects were initiated from other subject fields than strictly technical ones, for example forestry, work environment, cleaning, pensions etc. Terminology work in relation to translation became more predominant by the end of the eighties. TNC was engaged in a comprehensive translation project which took place from 1989 and onwards in connection with the establishment of a European Economic Area (EEA). About 10 000 pages of official EC documents were translated into Swedish and as an outcome of TNC's engagement we published a somewhat different dictionary "EC Words and Expressions"⁵. This dictionary contains Swedish and English terms, phrases, names and contexts extracted from parallel versions of some essential EC documents, the Rome Treaty for example. The aim was to proffer guidelines for translators and other users, to help avoid multiple translations appearing for the same concepts.

When Sweden entered the EU in 1995, TNC were assigned four comprehensive tasks concerning the updating of the European Commission's termbank Eurodicautom with Swedish terminology. Within a period of five years, TNC updated Eurodicautom with approximately 140 000 Swedish terms, mostly also with definitions, covering about 100 different subject fields.

TNC's query service and special term groups

TNC's terminological query service is one of the services offered to those who need terminological information and assistance in terminology-related issues. What distinguishes dealing with terminological queries from other terminology production, glossaries for example, is its just-in-time character. On the other hand, what unites this activity with glossary production is that it embraces almost the same activities: searching terminological information, analyzing and, in many cases, producing new terminological knowledge in the form of new terms, definitions, concept descriptions etc. One might see the processing of a specific query as a kind of terminology project on a lesser scale. The accumulation of queries

⁴ Wennerberg, J. (1955). Ordförklaringar. Ord och uttryck, 25, p. 21-22. (TNC 25).

⁵ EGs ord och uttryck (EC Words and Expressions) (1993). Wiken. ISBN 91-7119-394-4

and communication between TNC and clients also stimulate larger projects.

TNC has been providing a terminological query service to specialist language users and members of the public alike since its foundation. Typically, in the earlier days many queries concerned concepts and terms that belonged to the basic and general technical vocabulary. It was natural, at the beginning of TNC's existence, that people sought recommendations on how to distinguish between general technical terms such as *machine*, *instrument* and *apparatus* since until then, the only advice that could be found was what general dictionaries stated and that was mostly of a descriptive rather than a collaboratively normative nature.

From the 40's to the 60's, the majority of the queries concerned scientific and technical fields. Today it is a wider variety of subject fields: medicine and health care, law, chemistry, public administration, training and teaching, computer science, life sciences and telecommunications. A similar development pertains to the variety of occupations of present day service users; formerly the majority of users were subject-field specialists and today's users tend to work in public administration, or as translators, teachers, technical writers, journalists etc.

An interesting aspect of the query service is how it helps TNC "detect" new tendencies in LSP, in one or several subject fields. As said above English has a strong influence on the Swedish language in some domains and speech situations. In 1996 when the use of Internet and e-mail was still relatively new, there was an increasing number of queries about Swedish equivalents for terms such as *homepage*, *e-mail*, *web*, *chat*. Shortly after that, the Swedish Language Council and TNC formed The Joint Group for Swedish Computer Terminology. Later we created other similar groups, among them the Joint Group for Swedish Life Sciences Terminology.

The objective of these groups is to consolidate and, as inadequacies in current usage may require, create an adequate terminology that does not require switching from Swedish to English, as well as to harmonize the existing terminology by analyzing concepts and providing plausible definitions and explanations. The groups consist of general-language cultivation experts, terminologists, subject field experts, sometimes also media representatives. These groups are not like the project groups that produce a glossary in a special field, they are rather to be understood as emergency wards that solve ('heal) term problems for laymen and experts alike, i.e. not only experts. The groups often treat individual concepts rather than entire concept systems as an immediate measure to propose terms that serve evolving usage well.

Termbanks

The first term bank of TNC was a card file. This collection of cards had been piling up already from the very beginning in the late 30s. Each card contained a term and its source, and very often the terms were excerpts from handbooks and literature. At the end of the 60's, TNC began to use computer-aided methods in elaborating glossaries and this led to the development of an electronic term bank which, in the middle of the 80's, could be accessed via modem. In 1987 TNC published its termbank on a cd-rom for the first time. Other publications of TNC's termbank took place in 1989, 1992 and 2005.

In 2006 TNC received special financing from the Ministry of Enterprise, Employment and Communications to start building a national web-based term bank, Rikstermbanken. The

reasons for this initiative is stated in several government bills: Here is one example::

“ Terminology work contributes to a well-functioning language within all areas of society and increases efficiency within, and between various subject fields. The fast development of society requires constant work on creating and making accessible agreed-upon terminologies, within more and more subject fields. An easy access to terms via the Internet in a national termbank endorses such a development.”⁶

During the first phase of development we have looked at other web-based termbanks, e.g. EU's IATE and the Lithuanian Terminu Bankas. We are now in the second phase and have so far developed a software and a termbank prototype containing about 7 000 records, most of them from TNC's glossaries. Our glossaries will constitute the basis of Rikstermbanken but the collection of material from other parties has already started, mainly from public agencies. In order to decide what terminologies qualify for insertion in Rikstermbanken, we are drawing up quality criteria that we will use to classify and evaluate the various terminologies. To begin with the following criteria have been considered as the most important ones: reliability/provenance/origin, up-to-dateness, originality; contents (number of languages, quality of definitions etc.) We are planning to make a first version of Rikstermbanken public by the end of 2008.

Training activities

In Sweden, courses on terminology started off later than in some other Nordic countries. Training in terminology at universities began on a relatively large scale in Denmark and Finland in the early 70's (in business economics) while in Sweden training was confined to learning on the job (at TNC), not in degree or diploma programmes. Sweden's centre for terminology is the oldest in the Northern region but interestingly enough we have been late in establishing training at our universities.

Within the framework of Nordterm cooperation four post-graduate courses – the first one in 1978 – have been arranged. The foci of knowledge are somewhat different in the Nordic countries, and an important function of these courses were to contribute to the sharing, exchange and development of knowledge.

These courses gradually also led to training at Swedish universities and most of the training is given by TNC, sometimes in cooperation with The Institute for Interpretation and Translation Studies at Stockholm University. The majority of these courses are part of other programmes, mainly within translator training or linguistic curricula. The spring of 2002 saw the establishment of the first separate terminology course for credit at Stockholm university. And now, January 2008, we have just finished a fourth course for credit and, for the second time, as a web-based distance course.

TNC also offers custom-made courses for special projects or interest groups both in the public and the private sector.

As a matter of fact, training activities have expanded more than the other of the TNC's activities during the last decade. The raised terminological awareness that we see as a result of the current information and knowledge society (see below) leads to this demand; many people

⁶ Från IT-politik för samhället till politik för IT-samhället (2005). p. 207. (SOU 2004/05:175). (Government bill on Sweden's ICT policy)

need to understand more of terminology theory and the principles and methods for terminology work.

When it comes to training, we have the following vision for the future at TNC:

- to elaborate and develop more web-based courses, both on a national and on a Nordic level
- to argument for terminology modules in *all* university programmes, not only in translation and linguistic programmes, and this at an early stage of the training. We are convinced that terminological awareness is an important and valuable tool in the acquisition of knowledge.

New challenges

Society's transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society raises new demands and it has an impact also on terminology work. Now activities concerned with

- quality assurance,
- semantic interoperability,
- knowledge organisation and knowledge handling,
- the structuring of information in the development of ICT-systems (content management),
- automatic handling of large quantities of information, and
- re-use of information, e.g in health care records,

have put terminological needs in another light. This is very much the case in the health care sector where an unambiguous and clear terminology is desired in connection with statistics and follow up-methods, the electronically storing of information, routines concerning patients' security etc.

As in many other countries, the Swedish public administration is facing a great challenge – transforming into the modern so-called e-government, i.e. using new technology and finding new electronic ways of filing and communicating with citizens etc. This development will entail the need for precise terminology, and different authorities need to start making inventories of existing terminology, harmonizing and coordinating their terminology work. This has been further emphasized by several public investigations, as has also the need for appointing specific people responsible for terminology work. Some Swedish public agencies have already established their own in-house terminology organisation, one example is the National Board for Health and Welfare.

To sum up: terminology work today is very often an integrated part of other projects, for example, in the development of an ICT-system where focus is put on the structuring of content.

These new demands have assigned TNC with new tasks and projects and so far we have experienced that good knowledge of the principles of terminology as well as mastery of terminological working methods are most essential; terminologists are specialists in knowledge handling and communication and are able to deal with this in a systematic way – all of which is needed in this new development. However, we are no longer the only organisation offering terminological services as we used to be fifteen years ago. There are also other terminology consultants “on the market”, for example people with a background in informatics, translation and computer science.

Terminology work in public agencies and private companies

The last ten years or so have seen an interesting development where some public authorities and private companies have established an in-house terminology section or department. The National Board of Health and Welfare employs five terminologists and they elaborate terminologies of narrow health and welfare fields and publish the results in a termbank, accessible to all from their web site. TNC and the National Board cooperates closely; TNC is involved in several of their terminology projects and supports them in training as well. A newly started project is the translation into Swedish of Snomed CT, a British-American classification and terminology system of clinical terms. Snomed contains more than 300 000 concepts and the task of organizing this huge translation project was assigned to the National Board of Health and Welfare. TNC has been engaged by the National Board in elaborating the terminological and linguistic guidelines for the translators in this work and also to train them in terminological working methods.

The company Scania, a leading manufacturer of heavy trucks and buses also have an in-house terminology department with five terminologists. Only a few other companies in Sweden are also investing in terminology but with much less resources than Scania.

Conclusions

- Terminology work is always directed to the future. Its objective is to improve domain specific communication and to lay the foundation for efficient communication for purposes of knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer and high-quality translation. This work is always "modern" and stands on two legs: continuity and development.
- Terminologists have to keep up with new developments and be aware of new demands. Good knowledge of the principles of terminology and mastery of the working methods help the terminologist to work in a constantly changing environment.
- More terminologists are needed to bridge gaps in the contemporary information society! Training in terminology is therefore important. Training also allows certification and therefore quality control of terminological work. Without proper and recognized training programmes anyone can claim to use "terminologist" as a title.
- We, all of us terminologists, must strive constantly to make visible how our work benefits society, we must spread the word, provide training and market ourselves, at the very same time as we sort out concepts, write definitions and recommend terms.