



Directorate-General for Translation  
Terminology Coordination

# Why is terminology your passion?

The third collection of interviews  
with prominent terminologists

Note to the reader

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# TERMCOORD BRINGS HIGH-PROFILE TERMINOLOGISTS TOGETHER

In this e-book TermCoord has published interviews with prominent terminologists about their work, their projects and their opinions on interesting terminological issues. These interviews were carried out by trainees from the European Parliament's Terminology Coordination Unit and the interviewees are all terminologists who have made an active contribution to the field.

The aim of this initiative is to shine a light on terminology work and raise awareness about its importance for both monolingual and multilingual communication.

The interviews were designed and carried out entirely by the individual interviewers, who were responsible for personally suggesting and contacting the terminologists they chose to interview.



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## Interview with Federica Scarpa



[IATE] It contains millions of terms and in all the 24 official language of the EU, making it the first port of call for any professional translator and translator trainee when faced with a translation task focusing on a specialised domain they are not already familiar with.

**Federica Scarpa** is a full Professor of English Language and Translation at the Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies (IUSLIT) of the University of Trieste, where she teaches Specialised Translation.

She has published extensively on specialised translation (her book “La traduzione specializzata”, Hoepli, Milan, is now in its second edition) with a particular focus on legal translation, corpora-based Translation Studies in the specialist domains of IT, migration studies, medicine and law, and on a professional approach to translator training, founded both on an ethics of translation as service and on the synergies that should exist between academia and the translation industry in order to raise the translator’s professional profile.

### 1. How did you first become interested in terminology?

My interest in terminology started in 1989, when I was recruited by Microsoft as Italian Language Specialist to work at its Dublin-based International Product Group. At the time I was a young lecturer at the SSLMIT of the University of Trieste on a sabbatical to read for an M.Phil. in Linguistics at Trinity College Dublin. That very year, Microsoft was moving its localisation team for Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian and, crucially, Italian, from its headquarters in Redmond (Seattle) to Dublin, at a time when Ireland was establishing a fiscal and legal framework which had also attracted to the country other IT organisations such as Intel, ADOBE and Oracle.

An important part of my responsibility for language usage in all Microsoft products and services aimed at the Italian market was the standardisation of terminology. In those days, the awareness of language usage among hardware and software developers was rather low and the very idea of localisation was still in its infancy. This meant that there were many terminological inconsistencies among Microsoft products, but also between Microsoft products and those of other software and hardware firms.

For example, the Italian translation of Save was “salvare” in MS Word for Windows but “archiviare” in MS Word for the Macintosh. Likewise, the Italian translation of directory was “directory” for Microsoft products but a now-sounding rather dated “direttorio” for IBM. The approach to terminology was term-oriented and very basic lists of terms and their translations were compiled in Excel spreadsheets with no definitions or contexts provided, but only the specification of the product where a term occurred. Since then things have



of course changed a lot, as described in her TermCoord interview by Licia Corbolante, who succeeded me as Microsoft Italian Specialist in 2001, when I decided to leave Microsoft to go back to my job in Trieste.

## **2. You are mainly dealing with specialised translation. How important do you think terminological research is for a translator, especially when working on technical and specialised texts?**

Knowing how to search for terminology, evaluate the reliability of documentary sources, make the correct terminological choice and manage terminology for future reference, and being able to do all this both quickly and effectively, is paramount in professional technical and scientific translation. In the EMT (European Master's in Translation) reference framework, terminological and documentary research make up the so-called "Information-mining competence", one of the six competences of professional translation yielding the training objectives to be achieved, acquired and mastered at the end of any university-level translator-training programme worth its salt.

Of course, these six competences are interdependent and other competences apply to the information-mining one: knowing how to search for appropriate information to gain a better grasp of the thematic aspects of a document and learning to develop one's knowledge and terminology/phraseology in specialist fields and applications (thematic competence), and knowing how to create and manage a database (technological competence).

## **3. In your essay 'L'influsso dell'inglese sulle lingue speciali', you point out that Anglicisms are now frequently used in Italian not just in specialised languages, but rather in everyday language, and that they are often used by people who don't have a real knowledge of the English language. Do you think there is a possibility that this massive use of Anglicisms might impoverish the Italian language?**

I think that Anglicisms introduced in Italian as a direct result of specialised translation – direct borrowings, calques, and even grammatical constructions – are generally to be considered as an enrichment of the Italian language. They are usually functional to the specialised meanings of languages for specific purposes and come from language-changing creative processes which are inherent in cultural contacts.

To try and bar the entry of these foreign words into Italian would be senseless, as it is undeniable that in Italian Anglicisms are preferred for their conciseness (e.g. in ICT security, the borrowing "key escrow" instead of the rather unwieldy "deposito di una copia della chiave") and/or their symbolism and connotative power (e.g. "big bang" and "quark"). And it would also be useless: as we all know, English has now become the international language of science and technology (as well as business and law).

However, for someone like myself, who has taught specialised translation from English to Italian for more than 30 years, it is rather difficult to believe that, putting aside these perfectly plausible practical and sociological motivations, often the real reasons for choosing an Anglicism rather than an existing Italian equivalent or translating an English word into Italian, do not lie elsewhere – for example, in the laziness of a so-called 'translator', who more often than not in specialised translation is not a professional translator but merely a domain expert who 'knows' English. The evidence of this is to be found in the reasons why Anglicisms are often imported, e.g. the difficulty of finding an easy/adequate translation for words ending

with a preposition (“turnover”, “top-down”) or with an –ing form (“computer profiling”, “aliasing”). It is because of these self-styled improvised translators that the danger of impoverishing Italian is becoming real in today’s cultural context, where in fact even professional writers often use Italian carelessly, unlovingly and, ultimately, arrogantly, because by using English borrowings instead of existing more transparent Italian equivalents they are not bothered whether their message is really comprehensible to everyone.

**4. Together with Marella Magris, Maria Teresa Musacchio and Lorenza Rega you co-wrote *Manuale di Terminologia*, a collection of contributions by Italian and foreign linguists. How did you first decide to write this manual, and why did you choose to structure it like this?**

The *Manuale di Terminologia* the four of us co-edited in 2002 was the first volume on terminology in Italian and was the direct result of the work we had done in previous years constructing the SSLMIT TERMit multilingual terminology database. The contributions had a theoretical base but also a mainly didactic-methodological orientation, as suggested by the sub-title “Aspetti teorici, metodologici e applicativi”.

Besides the four chapters we contributed ourselves (“Le relazioni concettuali” by Marella Magris, “I tecnicismi collaterali” by Maria Teresa Musacchio, “Il termine in un’ottica terminologica plurilingue” by Lorenza Rega, and “Terminologia e lingue speciali” by myself), some Italian specialists and also some internationally-known experts made their own contributions, such as Khurshid Ahmad, Bassey E. Antia and Felix Mayer. The reason why we chose to structure the volume as an edited collection of papers by various authors, each addressing in turn the basic concepts of terminology, rather than as a monograph co-written just by ourselves is stated in the Introduction of the book: the intention of providing a review of the ‘polyphony of voices’ currently characterising the theories, methods and applications of terminology. Today, more than 10 years later, these different approaches are still relevant, though there have been important developments in the methodologies of the discipline which make the undertaking of a revised edition of the volume necessary.

**5. The former SSLMIT in Trieste has been working on TERMit for several years. Could you tell us what it is and how the project first started?**

The TERMit (Terminologia per Interpreti e Traduttori) project started at the very beginning of the 1990s with the aim of systematising the terminological work carried out at the SSLMIT and making it more accessible. The ‘founding mothers’ of the project were Marella Magris, Maria Teresa Musacchio (who later moved to the University of Padova), Lorenza Rega and myself, and the first ‘commissioner’ of multilingual terminology collections was the CDI (Centro di Documentazione Italiano) of the EU Commission in the person of its then Director Daniela Murillo Perdomo, who used to send us from Brussels on a regular basis a list of very specialised topics in need of multilingual terminology, from which students choosing terminology for their dissertation could make their choice.

Besides this list, she also used to send us the documentation relating to the specific topic chosen by the student, from which the different terms in Italian and the other language(s) could be extracted in their context of occurrence in order to create conceptual correspondences between the terms in different languages. Back then, all documentation was paper-based and communication was exclusively via fax or surface mail, and the resulting terminology collections were sent to Brussels as more or less ponderous tomes, to be stacked on the shelves of the CDI as reference sources for the Italian translators and interpreters working



at the EU. Thanks to the advent of mass-scale personal computing, the TERMit project has now become a multilingual terminology database counting about 350 collections in Italian (the pivot language) and mainly in English, French, German and Spanish (but also Croatian, Dutch, Russian and Slovenian) relating to specialised domains ranging from economics and law, through IT and engineering, to pharmaceuticals and biotechnology.

**6. It's mainly students who are working on implementing TERMit, choosing the topics and the languages to work on. Is there ever any specific need, such as a particular topic to work on, or a language to be added, or even a new analysis to be carried out for specific reasons? How do you deal with such specific needs?**

After many years in which students could choose the topics and languages to work on for their terminology collection, students choosing to do their dissertation on terminology are now increasingly asked to work on a specific topic in the language/s of their choice. This is mainly dictated by the needs of a database whose distribution of topics across the different languages has to be balanced by means of some planning and coordination, which are both carried out by Marella Magris.

Besides the integration of an existing terminology collection by adding a new language and/or updating it because of new developments in the specialised field it refers to, students may be asked to do their terminology work on a completely new collection. This can be either as a result of a specific request by a colleague specialising in a technical or scientific discipline, who is then going to be the external expert checking the accuracy of the specialised information provide in the collection, or as part of a wider research project carried out in the department where terminology is not the main focus, with the latter increasingly taking place after the SSLMIT merged with the School of Law of the University of Trieste in 2012.

**7. On the website, TERMit is described as being a *translation-oriented* What does this mean and how is it different from other termbases?**

TERMit is a concept-oriented (rather than lemma-oriented) multilingual database aimed first and foremost at translators and interpreters, though of course its terminology records can be very useful also for linguists and experts from other disciplines. Being concept-oriented, the correspondences between terms in different languages are created at the conceptual level, i.e. the starting point for each terminology record is the concept ("What is X called?"), rather than the term itself ("What does X mean?") as in a lemma-oriented approach to terminology. This is a reflection of natural mental processes and makes the translation process easier because the translator can:

- use different records to store the different meanings that the same term may have within the same discipline or in different disciplines: for example, the IT meaning and the medical meaning of the term "virus" can be stored in two different records and need not be stored in the same one (as in dictionaries: lexicographic approach);
- store in the same database an unlimited number of languages;
- look for a term irrespective of the direction of the source-language/target-language pair.

## 8. Do you know IATE, InterActive Terminology for Europe? Do you use it in your job?

IATE is an authoritative and very valuable online resource that is available to all, also allowing external users to provide suggestions on the development and improvement of its contents. It contains millions of terms and in all the 24 official language of the EU, making it the first port of call for any professional translator and translator trainee when faced with a translation task focusing on a specialised domain they are not already familiar with.

## 9. Which, do you think, are the main differences between IATE and TERMit, not just from a structural point of view but also as far as the content is concerned?

There are obvious differences between the two databases concerning sheer size, number of languages and specialised domains covered, that make a comparison nearly impossible. However, besides the fact that TERMit has ceased to be online for technical problems that we hope to solve in the not too distant future, another difference between the two databases can be found at the level of the content of individual records, where the information provided in TERMit is much more detailed. Each TERMit record contains not only the main term in the source language and its equivalent in the target language, but also a whole set of extremely valuable additional information that helps the translator make the correct terminological choice. This additional information is contained in specific fields where a practically unlimited amount of information can be inserted:

- the conceptual fields Subject, Subfield and Concept field, based on the «Dewey Decimal Classification», whereby a concept is identified via a discipline, a more specific domain and a subdomain in order to avoid homonyms;
- the fields Definition, Context, Note (where explanatory notes may be provided also via images and links to other websites), Related words (containing the terms in a direct conceptual relation with the concept of the main term) and Types of relation (specifying the type of conceptual relation between the main term and its related terms, i.e. subordinate, superordinate, coordinate, antonym or general);
- the linguistic fields Morphosyntax, Grammar, Category, Lexica, Usage label, Regional label, Style label, Phraseology and Synonyms, containing information on the part of speech (noun, phrase, verb etc.) and the grammatical use (e.g. if a term is used only in the plural) of the term, the category it belongs to (abbreviation, acronym etc.), whether it has been found in specialised dictionaries, its register (formal, colloquial, official), whether it is used in specific geographical regions (for English: United States, United Kingdom, Canada etc.), the most frequent phraseologisms containing the main term and its synonyms;
- the bibliographic field Source, containing all the information on the sources of the term, of its definition(s), of its context(s) as well as of the specialised dictionaries where the main term has been found;
- the field Equivalence it-en (or, depending on the languages, it-fr, it-de), containing information on the degree of equivalence between the two terms that, in the two languages, represent the relevant concept.
- Of course, all this information is not always necessary, and we are planning to develop a tool enabling users to visualise, besides the full set of fields, also a limited number of fields according to the specific task at hand.

### About the interviewer

#### **Maria Bregolato**

was born in 1989 in Padua (Italy), she earned a Master's Degree in Translation and Conference Interpreting at the Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators (SSLMIT) of Trieste, with a thesis on terminology. During University she had the opportunity to travel and spent a semester at the Filozofski Fakultet in Zagreb, where she returned to complete her thesis, and a month in Valjevo (SRB) to perfect her knowledge of Croatian and Serbian. Moreover, she spent two months in Johannesburg (RSA) for her curricular internship. While still at University, she translated several documents for the Department of Physics of the University of Trieste, as well as for an engineering company based in Rijeka (HR). Since graduation, she has worked as a freelance translator for different clients, and attended seminars both in Italy and abroad.



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