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Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

**BORROWED TERMINOLOGY IN BUSINESS DISCOURSE:
THE PROBLEM OF SYNONYMY**

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Abstract

Terminological synonymy involving new borrowed contradicts the standard which demands it being absent in business communication. Yet, it occurs in a natural way. It is caused by the coexistence of a previous version and a new one, transliteration and transfer in Latin script with the translation of one term. The functioning of a new loanword in communication is supported by the operation of the law of linguistic economy, the influx of English loanwords, the prestige of foreign names, as well as the underdeveloped linguistic competencies of the communicators. Synonymy does not cause problems until it becomes information noise. The latter is the reverse side of an active borrowing coupled with the insufficiency of unification and terminology standardization. Such synonymy manifests itself in public policy, marketing, mass culture, economy, high-tech industries when mastering new or previously unutilized technologies. Apart from that, in discourse it is created as a part of communicative strategies, primarily in policy and marketing, and is used as a verbal resource of managing consumer and social behaviours. In a text / on sequentially linked pages of a website, and especially in a message targeted at non-professionals, terminological synonymy provokes misunderstanding of both discursive context and the text itself as the principal communicative unit. Therefore, the absence of terminological synonyms required by the discourse standard should be implemented, all the more so given that it is subject to the authors' qualification. The required skills can be developed in university courses by adding respective topics to the curriculum.

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Keywords: Borrowed terminology, nomenclature names, business discourse, terminological synonymy and its causes, communicative strategy.



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1. Introduction

One of the principal singularities of the contemporary business discourse as a type of institutional discourse (Karasik, Stebletsova, Shirayayeva, etc.) is a speech behaviour based on creative adherence to the norm and commitment to the standard reflected in the professional world view, business culture and corporate values. Business communication both among colleagues (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015; Karasik, 2002; Zaretskaya, 2016; etc.) and primarily with the non-professional public, for instance potential commissioners and customers, requires accuracy, clarity, brevity, explicitness of the message, as well as rules out ambiguity. These stylistic requirements obtain the status of ethical ones in business culture, as in the context of multitasking and time constraints these qualities are regarded as a linguistic expression of politeness and respect for your business partner.

In turn, the thematical basis for the professional language (which is the main subject of business discourse) is the subject-specific terminology. The success of communication, the purpose of which is to provide business interaction while reaching the set goals, hinges on its conformity with the requirements of the discourse (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015; Karasik, 2002). However, in terminology study terminology has been primarily studied as a part of the language of science, as a linguistic structure and a basis for the scientific functional style (Alekseyeva & Vasilenko, 2015; Danilenko, 1977; Leychik, 2007; Reformatskiy, 1961; Vorona, 2013), and as a unit of language conscience as seen from the cognitive perspective (Kiseleva & Rosyanova, 2016).

However, business discourse is a broader phenomenon than both business and scientific styles and comprises the properties of both. Business style as a language subsystem providing business interaction ensures the goals-setting – the deontic norm-setting, commitment to what is due and proper, and a benchmark performance of business communication pragmatical tasks. Business discourse borrows the subject terminology from the scientific discourse. Thus, doctors talk about medicine among themselves and with the patients, as well as in the mass media, while economists speak of finance, investment and other subjects topical for professionals, business and average depositors. Therefore, studying the problems of how terminology functions in various discursive situations, the “professional ↔ professional”, “professional → non-professional” types of communication will remain as relevant as ever.

It reaches critical importance in the growth points – the areas of an active development of a language, as it is inevitably accompanied with the growth diseases – the excessiveness of the process and, consequently, the loosening of the norm (literary, functional) in the language and the style system, information noise and interferences in discourse and text (riskogenics...) and the loss of speech behaviour standards and doubts of the members of language community.

2. Problem Statement

This could easily be verified by studying the professional forums devoted to the actively developing areas of humanities, technologies, economy and business. These websites suggest both the subject and the perspective of research – new vs English borrowings in the professional language, the problems of their integration and adaptation to the new language environment, various issues of their functioning in discourse and in a text/message as its unit.

This is the part of professional vocabulary that in the past 30 years has been actively replenished in the fields of economy, public policy, marketing, mass culture, new technologies through English loanwords and, on the one hand, fills in mental voids in the most economical and simple way, as well as ensures innovations (Bukina, 2016; Krysin, 2004; Kolyaseva, 2014; Latu, 2016). In this regard, the Russian language is doomed for an active “import” of industry-specific lexis for as long as the Russian society keeps borrowing technologies. This process as a part of a general borrowing process has been thoroughly studied in both diachrony and synchrony (Bukina, 2016; Krysin, 2004; Razduyev, 2015) in terms of reasons, forms, results, thematical lexical groups, the intermediary role of discourses, say, the mass media discourse as an area open to all innovations, which reflects and spreads them, as well as the professional activity, specifically that of translators.

However, terminology borrowing, in our opinion, is insufficiently studied in terms of its impact on the industry’s terminological system and business discourse. In particular, it has been pointed out that the uncontrollable and consciously unregulated borrowing of terms loosens the term system up and plunges it into a state of disorder. Back in the Soviet times it was the responsibility of terminologists (Leychik, 2007), while now standardization is not keeping up with an intensive process, despite the adoption of the standard in 2010.

This inevitable consequence has to be overcome when it comes to filling in mental voids, but the borrowing process concurrently leads to the active formation of terminological synonyms and doublets. The latter phenomenon additionally and mostly unnecessarily hampers professional communication among professionals, particularly that involving prospective non-professional customers. Specifically, it has been noted that a convoluted and incomprehensible language drives away investors.

Therefore, studying the reasons and forms of terminological synonymy in discourse and possibilities of neutralization of its destructive impact holds unfading relevance, and primarily so from the practical and didactical standpoint, i.e. growing a terminological culture when training future professionals. The latter is relevant, as a decent knowledge of professional English and communication with English-speaking colleagues in international companies boost the import of English loanwords, not to mention translators with their culturalizing function. “Non-linguist professionals oftentimes neglect the existing standards of term creation, which is similar to driving without following traffic rules – fast, reckless but havoc-wreaking and unsafe, which prompts the main question – why?”.

3. Research Questions

The questions addressed in the research are the following. What are the discursive reasons, forms and consequences of terminological synonymy, i.e. given that we are not dealing with the part of loanwords connected with filling in mental voids? Since terminological synonymy is a part of common-language process, is it any different from synonymy in general? What are the destructive manifestations of the process in the main discourse unit, the text, and are there ways to minimize them?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide answer to the questions above and produce recommendations in terms of building the professional text handling skills and techniques which can help neutralize the impact of terminological synonymy in a given message.

5. Research Methods

The chief research method is the analysis of borrowed (predominantly economic) terminology using the following parametres:

- contradistinguishing synonymy in business discourse as an external context, that in a cultural environment giving rise to the text, and synonymy in the text as a communicative unit of discourse, and identification of differences;
- contrasting the manifestations of contemporary terminological synonymy with the business discourse tradition and establishing the specifics of the current situation.

The following traditional definitions of concepts have been adopted as working ones:

Term – “a word or word combination denoting a concept of a special area of knowledge or activity. Terms are part of the general lexical language system but only through a specific terminological system” (Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary). The term’s singularity, which provides its explicitness and public authorization, is the registration of its meaning in the definition. However, no differences among terms, nomenclature names, synonyms and doublets are made.

Synonymy – “convergence in principal meaning of morphemes, words, syntactic structures, phraseological units, while maintaining differences in shades of meaning and stylistic nuances” (Rozenal & Telenkova, 1985, p. 208).

Business Discourse – a type of institutional discourse (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015; Karasik, 2002) based on the purposeful status and role verbal activity of people aimed at supporting their non-verbal business activity in a certain field– economy, pedagogy, manufacturing, etc. Its external context and conditions are business relations based on the common background knowledge, the norms, rules and values of communication established in a business society.

Text (message) – the principal communicative unit of the discourse, semantically and grammatically integral verbal / polycode message fulfilling the author’s objective and conveying the preset volume of information within the communicative scenario and genre (Valgina, 2003, etc.).

6. Findings

6.1. Terminological synonymy is a traditional polemical issue of linguistics. On the one hand, this is an artificial language system of business and scientific communication, the properties of which – accuracy, clarity, explicitness, unambiguity of meaning – predetermine the absence of synonymy as a standard requirement.

But on the other hand, synonymy is a general property of the language which is observed at any level and organizes its system in general. Synonyms are supplied in the language on a constant basis, as

they are the primary source of sense disambiguation at the language level, the speech level, the utterance level and the text level. Consequently, synonymy is present in terminology, too, but its impact on communication in specialized, thematically limited areas, proves to be destructive, as it goes against the requirement of accuracy and unambiguity of the utterance, as well as violates the integrity and consistency of the terminological system, which is confirmed by all researchers (Danilenko, 1977; Leychik, 2007; Reformatskiy, 1961).

Meaning disambiguation, in turn, is one of the key contemporary trends of language development (Valgina, 2001), especially in terms of reflecting mentally active, socially important fields of extralinguistic reality. In our times it is new technologies, economy, public policy, mass culture and marketing.

The language and social situation is such that this trend is fulfilled primarily at the expense of the English loanwords, the abundance of which often raises a doubt as to what language the text is written in: *Оригинатор посредством true sale уступает SPV пул лизинговых активов*. Thus, nowadays, the problem of synonymy is aggravated by the source of its occurrence – new borrowings. And while communication in such a language among professionals has some chance of being adequate, in a typical situation of institutional discourse. i.e. in the “professional→non-professional customer” type of business communication, it is doomed for failure.

Terminological synonymy as a phenomenon may be studied in two aspects: in business discourse as a communicative environment in terms of causes, singularities and consequences of its manifestation, and in the text in terms of its use by the speaker and its understanding by the primarily non-professional audience.

6.2. In discourse, terminological synonymy manifests itself not only in the area of new loanwords but is determined by the co-existence of:

- Latin/Greek and Russian versions (*литота, мейозис, преуменьшение* [litotes, miosis])
- a historically earlier and contemporary version (*грудная жаба / стенокардия* [breast pang, stenocardia])
- made in Latin script, transliteration and translation/loan translation (calque) of the term (*user /юзер/пользователь, утечка мозгов / brain drain /брейн дрейн*)
- individual style of related research fields (for instance, Mikhail Lomonovov, a prominent Russian scientist, preferred the term ‘atom’ to the word ‘element’).

Objectively, it is supported by the law of language economy: transliteration is often shorter (*хедж (хеджирование) / страхование финансовых рисков* [hedge (hedging) / financial risks insurance]) and requires fewer intellectual efforts than translation.

Apart from these objective reasons, there are also subjective ones, conducive to both borrowing and developing of terminological synonymy:

- psychological prestige, fashion for loanwords
- insufficient language competence of the communicants
- practically full absence of standardization in the field of terminology (while in the Soviet time this was a mandatory part of discursive terminology work)

- intention of communicators to create language visibility of differences between relative or similar phenomena.

So, terminological synonymy emerges practically for the same reasons as synonymy on the whole, and is irremovable in principle, even though it may be reduced to a minimum by means of purposeful unification efforts which are almost absent today. Yet, it becomes conspicuous in business discourse only when it creates information noise. Say, it is even preferable, to use the word *агроландшафт* (*agrolandscape*) instead of *сельскохозяйственный ландшафт* (*agricultural landscape*) and *дедлайн* (*deadline*) instead of *work completion date*, as the former are shorter. Yet, if *ромашку* (*daisy*) is called *нивяником* (*whiteweed*), many people are not going to understand what it is referred to, especially if we deal with communication with non-professionals, even though both names have been long integrated in speech.

The uniqueness of the current situation is in the fast change of technologies and concepts, and consequently, in the accelerated and hence insufficiently integrated borrowing, when an existing name is replaced with a different one (*секция*→*панель* (о конференции); *коворкинг* → *оупенспейс*; *мастер-класс*→*ворк-шоп*; *акции*→*бонды*, *финансирование по подписке* (т.е. вкладчину)→*краудфандинг*) [*section*→*panel* (at a conference); *coworking*→*open space*; *masterclass*→*workshop*; *stocks*→*bonds*; *subscription-based financing* (i.e. on a sharing basis/jointly) →*crowdfunding*].

Such a dash made by a new synonym in order to replace the first one, also still poorly integrated, is supported psychologically as well – loanwords are prestigious, as in the context of the defamation of the Russian business tradition a new word creates the impression of modernity and professionalism of the speaker and novelty of the business itself. Compare: government institutions employ *специалисты по кадрам* (*personnel specialists*) and sign *трудовые договоры* (*labour agreements*), while commercial institutions have *recruiters* (1990-2000) →*HR people* and enter into *contracts*.

The main and easiest way of borrowing terminology today is transliteration and oftentimes a parallel use of words in Latin script. This inevitably produces spelling and pronunciation variations: *startup/start-up/стартап*; *блоггер/блогер* (*blogger*); *HR/эйчар/ичар*, *PR /пиар*; *ютьюб/ютуб/ютюб* (*YouTube*), hence difficulties with choosing the right one. The uniqueness of business discourse is the intended preservations of commercial names like *Skype*, *Samsung*, *Coca-Cola* in the original Latin/English script as a trademark indicator along with the emergence of russified versions *Скайт*, *Самсунг*, *Кока-кола*.

Not only new but also long integrated terms become the synonyms for the existing ones. This way the established term systems loose up causing chaos in the professional language: *обзервер* (*observer*) instead of *наблюдатель*, *рисерч* (*research*) instead of *обследование*, *объект* (*object*) instead of *объект*, *френдли* (*friendly*) instead of *дружественный*; *хелпер* (*helper*) instead of *помощник*, *волонтер* (*volunteer*) instead of *доброволец*, *эдвайзинг* (*advertising*) instead of *реклама*, etc. At the same time, becoming wide-spread, this language is perceived by many as a norm and gets replicated, thus obtaining the usage status in the discourse.

The translation of a term and the search for the right equivalent have always posed a problem and produced both synonyms and distortions due to external factors, for instance due to the term's ambiguity in the source language. Thus, discussions are still going on among economists regarding the adequacy of

translating Karl Marx's term *Mehrwert* (*surplus value/added value*) as *прибавочной стоимости* (*premium*) instead of *ценности* (*value*) and the theoretical consequences arising from this fact.

There have always been cases of insufficient language background knowledge of the communicators and their quantity varied. For instance, the name *Книга Бытия* (Genesis) was translated in the mid-20th century as *Генезис* (an example mentioned by Nora Gal). In essence, the translator did the same as what is happening now, i.e. used transliteration instead of translation. But today the flow of borrowings is more intensive, while the temptation to leave the term untranslated and resort to transliteration is authorized by the usage. Furthermore, there is almost no standardization and terminology unification in place.

Losing out are both professionals who have to spend the time doing Russian-to-Russian translation (it is sufficient to look up discussions on professional websites), and non-professionals who are deprived of such opportunity due to lack of professional knowledge. The latter also find themselves involved in business communication, for example, as potential customers, consumers of goods and services.

Will everyone be able to understand at once that *рефрижератор* is a kitchen fridge, *митинг* is a meeting, say with a friend, unlike a public activity, *премиальная карта* is not a reward but a bank card of the top service class, *идентичность* is not sameness but difference (*национальная идентичность - national identity*)?

In public policy and marketing, terminological synonymy is created in an artificial way. Its uniqueness is that the goal set is to bring apart and contradistinguish nominations. The technique is used consciously as a resource of managing voter and consumer behaviours of the target audience. The political entities that have discredited themselves have now rehabilitated: *пропаганда* → *политпросвет* → *политический пиар* → *социальные технологии* → *гуманитарные технологии* → *пропаганда* (*propaganda* → *political education* → *political PR* → *social technologies* → *humanitarian technologies* → *propaganda*); a new 'shell' for the already familiar essence thus creating an impression of a new public phenomenon/institution: *СМИП* → *СМИ* [*mass information and propaganda media* → *mass media*]; *прибавочная стоимость* → *добавленная стоимость* [*surplus value* → *added value*] (a new market-oriented translation of Karl Marx's term); the consumer behaviour within a certain model is stimulated, as well as the desire to purchase yet another product – on sale is a dream named with a new word: *тапочки* (*slippers*) → *слипоны* (*slip-on shoes*) → *лоферы* (*loafer shoes*), *стиль жизни* (*way of life*) → *лайфстайл* (*lifestyle*). The difference entities are limited with assessments and connotations, or shades of meaning of ideographical synonyms (for instance, slippers might have or not have laces, to exaggerate the example), but the word thus creates an appearance of something new and necessary for the consumer/voter.

6.3. The second aspect of the analysis and assessment of terminological synonymy is a message: text / page or a sequence of interlinked pages on a website. Here, the presence of terminological synonym is considered as communicative, or rather editorial, professionalism. If there are synonyms in a discourse, the preference is given to one of them, to avoid misunderstanding.

For instance, the discourse simultaneously has the synonyms *пассворд* and *пароль* (*password and code word*). But on websites all interlinked pages should have either one or another. However, this editorial rule is not always followed. And there is only one reason for it – the communicators are not

aware of the requirement for the mandatory unification of terminology in a text / on a website, the tasks different specialists perform with the text are miscoordinated, they lack proofreading and term-building skills. For example, in one of Microsoft Word versions the command *переместить* (*relocate/transfer*) has been changed for *импортировать* (*to import*). How is the average user supposed to understand that, given that he or she knows that import is about bringing something in, and not the other way around? Another example: one website page shows the command *введите пароль и имя* (*enter code word and name*) followed by a second page which reads *введите пароль и логин* (*enter password and login*). What is supposed to bring the users to the conclusion that those are the same commands? And the last example: the tax service website, without having notified the users, has changed the name (just the name with the same content) of the option *электронная подпись* (*e-signature*) replacing it with a different one – *ключ к электронной подписи* (*key to the e-signature*). So, what are the good faith taxpayers supposed to think?

Meanwhile, such information interferences, as a rule, can easily be removed using the literary text processing before publishing/posting on any technical platform. You only need to know the unification rule of processing for standardized data, namely the exclusion of terminological synonymy in the text: it should be either *пароль* or *пароль*, but all the text, including its interlinked pages and hyperlinks should have one and the same variant. Inside this text, all such nominations should be tracked down and compared. This is one of the message pre-publication procedures that you should know and train in yourself. The key terms should be given definitions either in weblinks or in the text, but in a way unmissable for the user (Milchin, Nakoryakova).

6.4. The said text problems of terminology relate not only to synonymy and borrowings. Hereby we are giving several examples from the Internet without commenting on them: *На УЗИ поставили диагноз **открытое овальное окно** [The ultrasound examination produced the following diagnosis – **open oval window**]; на сайте РЖД, чтобы **сдать** билет, надо догадаться сначала войти в опцию «**Покупка билетов**», одно и то же содержание подразумевают кнопки **узнать статус билета** и **обновить статус билета** [On the Russian Railways website, to return the ticket you first have to click on “**Buy Tickets**”. The very same content implies options ‘**Check Ticket Status**’ and ‘**Update Ticket Status**’].*

While university courses of speech culture give little, if any, attention to the problems of borrowings, they keep secretive about working with terminology and rules of text processing. Meanwhile, these skills are now necessary to all of us, because everybody finds themselves involved in business discourse. Shouldn't we then incorporate editorial topics, specifically terminology work, in the speech culture courses?

7. Conclusion

The issue of terminological synonymy involving new English loanwords is one of the most persistent problems in both business discourse and text – the more intensive the process is and the less developed the neutralization skills of the speakers of a certain language are, the more probable are the information interferences arising because of it. In a discourse as a communicative environment, the absence of identical terms is a desirable but unattainable goal (where the only thing we can do is shorten

the distance between the desirable and the real), since terminology, artificial yet incorporated in the systemic connections of a language, adheres to the laws of its development, while synonymy is the main source of sense disambiguation. But it is quite possible to give definitions to the key terms, especially those poorly integrated, choose one of the synonyms and follow the identity in nominations in a text or on a website. All we need to do to this end is expand the circle of experts possessing the necessary knowledge and skills. As a first step, we can include respective topics in the mandatory speech culture courses at our universities.

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