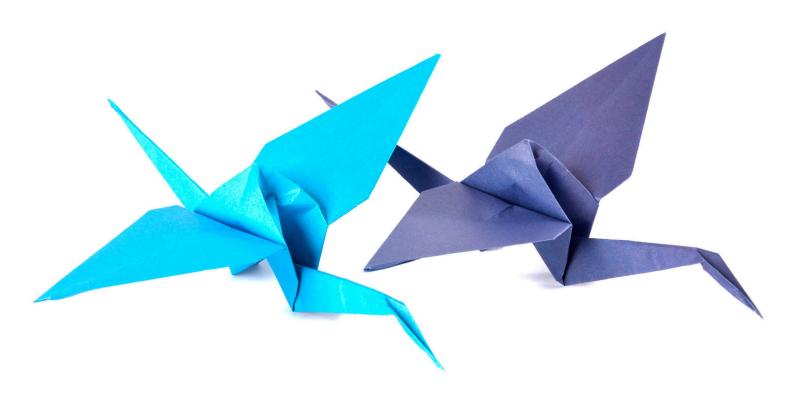# Why is terminology your passion?

The second collection of interviews with prominent terminologists

Note to the reader

Author: Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament

Katia Peruzzo

by Silvia Piparo

Katia Peruzzo was born in Trieste, Italy. She has a PhD in Translation at the Department of Legal, Language, Translation and Interpreting Studies of the University of Trieste, where she now teaches Terminology at the II level Master Course in Legal Terminology. She also holds an MA degree in Technical and Scientific Translation in English and Spanish and a BA degree in Interpreting and Translation in English, Spanish and Slovenian from the University of Trieste. Her research interests are English and Italian legal terminology, comparative law, terminology and knowledge management.

What is your academic background and what first attracted you to the field of Terminology?

My interest in Terminology started during my undergraduate days at the former Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators of the University of Trieste, Italy. More than a decade ago now, I was looking for a topic

for my Bachelor's degree dissertation. On account of my general inclination toward anything practical, after attending a course in Terminology and Terminography, I decided to venture into a trilingual (Italian, English and Spanish) terminographic research project whose results could be useful for technical translators. Therefore, I chose mechanics as the subject of my study, but since I wanted to try hands-on what it means to work as a terminographer and collaborate with a subject expert (in this case a mechanic engineer), I narrowed down the research field and decided to analyse the terminology referring to a means of transport typical of my hometown, i.e. the Opicina Tramway. And this is how it all began. Two years later I started working on my Master's degree dissertation. Again a terminographic research, but on a completely different topic, i.e. legal terminology. I think it was at that time that I realised that the field of terminology offered considerable scope for investigation and required a high degree of scrupulousness, diligence and patience. And I liked it. I enjoyed working on legal texts, trying to understand the meaning of incredibly long sentences – I thought it was pretty much like puzzle-solving. But what really attracted me to this discipline was my lack of proper means to describe the phenomena that I could observe in legal terminology but I could not explain in words nor classify in the terminology management tools I had at my disposal. This is why I decided to continue on this path. After completing my Master's degree in Specialised Translation in 2007, I collaborated with some members of the *Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale* on a terminographic project on the same topic of my dissertation. While working as a freelance translator, in 2009 I was awarded a PhD fellowship in Interpreting and Translation Studies and in 2013 I defended my doctoral dissertation on terminological variation and equivalence on a specific criminal law topic, i.e. victims of crime.

You were awarded the CIUTI prize for best thesis in 2009 for your work "A termbase on the terminology of EUROPOL and police cooperation in English and Italian". Could you tell us more about it?

When it was time for me to think about my Master's thesis, my supervisors, Prof. Scarpa and Prof. Magris, asked me to integrate Ilenia Chezzi's terminographic dissertation in Italian and German on the terminology of Europol and police cooperation in Europe. I was expected to provide English term entries and update the Italian parts, if necessary. Although the main focus was terminology (like in my previous dissertation), this was a completely different task. Until then, I had always thought I would never ever work with legal language. "It's too repetitive, too difficult, too archaic. There are too many things to learn by heart and too many unnecessary details to remember", I kept telling myself. But sometimes life takes us to unexpected places. Mine is the language of criminal law. I accepted the challenge and, in order to

fill my knowledge gaps, found a lawyer at the former Law Faculty of the University of Trieste who was willing to follow me in this adventure. I will always be grateful to Prof. Gialuz for helping me take my first steps in this threatening world of archaic and innovative linguistic features led by creative-thinking legislators – a world about which I have been deepening my understanding ever since. The dissertation consisted in populating TERMit, the University of Trieste terminological database, with term entries containing English terms related to the European police office and police cooperation in Europe in general. However, the study implied a two-tiered analysis: on the one hand, the Italian terms already included in TERMit had to be matched with English translation equivalents; on the other, the peculiarities of English used as a lingua franca in the European Union had to be considered. First of all, I carried out a comparative analysis of the Italian and English legal systems so as to identify possible cases of conceptual misalignment that may be reflected in the terminology used, such as the different criteria for the classification of offences in Italy as compared to England and Wales (e.g. delitti e contravvenzioni vs. "indictable offences, summary offences and offences triable either way"). While looking for English equivalents, however, and since the framework of the analysis was European, I had to take into account also the differences between the national and the supranational varieties of English. It was only then that I recognised how difficult it is to classify and keep trace of all the possible terminological variants of terms rooted in a multilayered legal scenario such as the EU and to store them in a database that should provide all the necessary linguistic and conceptual information without ending up confusing end users. In 2009 my dissertation was awarded the first Ciuti Prize in Geneva ex aequo with Kevin Ryckaert's dissertation (Artesis Hogeschool).

You teach Legal Terminology and Translation at the Master of Legal Translation at the University of Trieste. Can you tell us how important is terminology in this particular field?

Let me answer this question with the following quote: "Legal terminology is the most visible and striking linguistic feature of legal language as a technical language, and it is also one of the major sources of difficulty in translating legal documents" (Cao 2007: 53-54). Legal terminology is the outward result of the evolution experienced by the legal system that uses it. This means that the underlying legal system is inextricably linked to the language used to express it and, in translation, this link is even more noticeable, since the unavailability of a suitable translation equivalent in the target language is more a rule than an exception. Scholars focusing on legal translation seem to agree that, in order to provide a successful translation of a legal text, a legal translator must have a basic knowledge of the legal systems concerned, be familiar with the relevant terminology and be competent in the target

language legal writing style. In my opinion, though, legal translators cannot content themselves with a basic understanding of law and thus need a thorough knowledge of the legal terminology. This is especially true when we consider languages such as English, French, and, to a lesser extent, Italian, which, apart from being the official languages of different countries, are also EU official languages. When it comes to legal translation, this brings about tremendous consequences, given that the same term may have slightly or totally different meanings according to the legal system it refers to. This means that legal translators need to constantly be on the lookout so as to avoid terminological pitfalls.

You dealt with EU languages and EU terminology in your article *"Secondary term formation within the EU: term transfer, legal transplant or approximation of Member States' legal systems";* **what have been the major advances in legal terminology area and what remains to be done in the future?**

Ever since my Master's dissertation, legal terminology in general, and EU terminology in particular have become the leitmotiv of my research. With regard to my own experience as a terminographer, since I work mainly with two languages, i.e. English and Italian, I think that several advances have been made in the new millennium. Within the EU institutions, the creation of a new legal system with so many different official languages has put the spotlight on the issue of multilingualism and the development of a highly advanced translation and interpreting service. The harmonisation attempts made by EU institutions in many different legal fields have attracted the interest of the scientific community at large. Lawyers and linguists alike have been concerned with the development of a new supranational legal system ever since its creation, but in my opinion it is only in the last fifteen years that the need for cross-disciplinary studies has arisen so strikingly. Although the importance of the inseparable link between language and law has been recognised by scholars from different disciplines, the collaboration between them can be considered fairly recent. This collaboration is particularly beneficial to the study of legal terminology as it can benefit from the scholars' specialisation in different fields. Not only can it lead to more accurate research results, but it can also promote and facilitate the development of new types of tools useful for practical purposes. I'm here referring to, for instance, the interdepartmental studies carried out at the University of Turin, where lawyers and IT scientists develop ontologies as the basis of multilingual dictionaries and thus necessarily deal with both terminological and conceptual issues. But I'm also thinking of another example in which I was personally involved, i.e. the collaboration brought about by the recent merger of the former Law Department and the Language, Interpreting and Translation Department into the so-called IUSLIT at the University of Trieste, where a translation team worked with a

group of legal experts on the translation into English of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure, published in 2014. Given that the translation was meant to reach a wide audience, at least within the EU borders, we as translators had to think over the best variety of English to choose as the target language. We finally opted for European English and this led to a thorough analysis of the available terminology in European texts and of its suitability for our purposes.

To sum up, a fundamental advance in legal terminology in the European scenario is the bringing together of scholars and disciplines to research the same data from different perspectives and contribute to the evolution of knowledge, with positive, concrete implications in several professional spheres. We only need to think of the usefulness of terminological resources developed by teams of lawyers and linguists. On the other hand, I think there are still two relatively underdeveloped areas in the field of legal terminology. First, the study of the dynamics of terminology in such an intricate legal reality as the EU. What I mean here is, for instance, the influence of national terminology on EU terminology and vice versa, which would lead to the adoption of a more overtly diachronic perspective. EU legislation advances and changes at such a fast pace that it would be very interesting to monitor these changes and the consequences for the languages involved. Greater insight would thus be reached into the linguistic strategies that are adopted as a consequence of conceptual development. Second, much more effort should be put into the identification of the essential features of legal translation-oriented terminological repositories. In my opinion, although sharing many characteristics with most terminologies, legal terminology presents some peculiar features that cannot be properly recorded in the most widespread terminological resources. An example is the polysemy or homonymy resulting from the existence of the same term in different legal systems expressed by the same language or the co-existence of several legal systems in the same geographical area.

As a translator with a deep knowledge of terminology what are the main characteristics of your methodology? What kind of techniques do you use for terminology research? What do you concentrate on?

To answer this question I need to make some preliminary remarks. First, in my professional life as a translator, my primary concern is to provide my clients with a high quality product, mostly in a very short space of time. This means that usually I don't have enough time for creating proper terminological records. Secondly, the linguistic combination I most frequently work with as a translator is Slovene-Italian. This has obvious consequences for the methodology to adopt, since Slovene can be considered as a language of lesser diffusion and there are fewer resources available.

Indeed, I don't think that in everyday life professional translators follow a single methodology when it comes to terminology. Being a translator you need to solve terminological problems as you encounter them. You don't usually embark on a systematic analysis of the terminology of the field that the source text belongs to. And the more experience you acquire, the more you are able to recognise the most efficient way of finding the appropriate translation equivalent according to the type of terminological unit you need to translate. It can be said that you develop a sort of sixth sense and a series of shortcuts that allow you to optimise your time. And the more you translate texts of the same field, the better you get at these skills, because generally term formation follows the same patterns within a certain domain and a certain language. The internet in this regard is one an invaluable resource, though you need to be extremely cautious and always check twice, if not three or four times, to be sure that an equivalent you find online is correct. Let me give you some examples from my own experience When I translate Slovene official documents, such as parts of statutes or decrees, I look for existing parallel texts issued in the bilingual area of Koper in order to find the equivalent terms that have already been established in this area. However, if the text is not to be used in this area, I need to check whether the equivalents that work well there are also suitable for a different audience and, if not, I have to find the most appropriate strategy to render the meaning by using other Italian terms. If, on the other hand, I'm asked to translate a text that is targeted to the EU, such as an application form for the financing of a cross-border co-operation project, I will probably find the terminology I'm looking for in other languages as well. In this case, if I can't find the equivalents straight away, I can always rely on some other language, which is a great advantage. This happens especially in some particular areas of knowledge. For instance, if the Slovene source text deals with IT, I know I should look at the English equivalents first, since Italian is very keen on English loan words in this sector. When, on the other hand, cuisine is involved, the pivot language for several cooking techniques is French, while for animals and plants Latin still plays a fundamental role. But there are two other powerful features of the Internet that should not be overlooked: images and free expert support. By comparing images accompanied by textual material in different languages, translators may decide whether to accept or discard a translation equivalent they came across or understand the differences of an object when used in one culture or country or another. As to free expert support I think of two different groups of people. On the one hand, there are translators' communities, where translators meet peers virtually, and share experiences and knowledge. On the other there are experts' communities, where translators meet knowledgeable persons in a wide variety of fields who are generally willing to share their knowledge and also help also in linguistic issues. And their support is usually very valuable.

Does being a "good translator" mean giving special importance to terminology? Or do you think that translators, on the contrary, often focus more on the translation of all other lexical elements than on terminology?

To answer this question you should first have a clear idea of what a "good translator" is like. However, although some characteristics of a good translator are self-evident, many of them depend on different factors, the most prominent of which is the type of project he or she is assigned. Nevertheless, several studies confirm that, unless the translator is a field expert himself or herself, in specialised translation searching for terminology is one of the tasks that require the longest time in the translation process. The reason for this is the role played by terminology within specialised texts: terms can be considered as linguistic markers of the conceptual structure typical of the knowledge field concerned and at the same time a sort of "concentrates of knowledge", i.e. concise lexical units that condense a huge amount of conceptual content. Given the complexity of understanding the meaning of such terms and then finding a suitable translation equivalent and evaluating the degree of equivalence, it comes as no surprise that much research focuses on the development of tools and methods for terminology extraction and alignment. However, in this regard I can't help noticing the gap that still exists between academia and professionals. The term extraction tools that I have tried so far, for instance, prove very useful in the retrieval of terminology for research purposes, but they present several drawbacks that might be leading translators to refrain from using them in their everyday life, such as the need to build a corpus of texts, the time necessary for training the software (which is not always as smart as we think it is) or the limited languages supported by the software. All in all, I think that in specialised translation terminology plays a crucial role and that proficient translators are perfectly aware of this, therefore they know how to balance their efforts so as to give the right relevance to every individual element that makes up a text as a whole.

I imagine that you are familiar with IATE, the terminology database of the European Institutions; what is your opinion on it? How do you think it can be improved?

I consider IATE a very valuable resource. Nowadays terminology is stored in so many different resources that it is not difficult to imagine that a professional whose job involves the use of different languages may sometimes feel overwhelmed. The effort made by the European institutions to merge their existing terminological databases into a single resource and to make it available not only for internal use, but to the general public, is more than praiseworthy. In my opinion, IATE has several strong points, although the existence of some room for improvement cannot be denied. First of all, from the user's perspective, IATE's search function has a limited

number of fields that can be defined by the user. In other words, you can insert the term you are looking for and decide the languages in which you would like to find an equivalent and, optionally, the relevant domain and whether you are looking for a term or an abbreviation. But there may be other interesting and useful information recorded in some other fields, such as the definition or note fields, which cannot be accessed by using the search function and whose retrieval is thus only based on serendipity. On the other hand, IATE offers a series of major advantages. For instance, it contains an incredibly high number of terms and covers a wide variety of domains in all the 24 official languages of the EU. This is very interesting in my view, since even if an entry is incomplete, the other languages may help to find the necessary information, something that is practically impossible in bilingual resources. Moreover, IATE's structure can be considered dynamic, since it allows new terms to be added and the already existing contents to be updated at any time. Another advantage is that it leaves room for the end users to get involved in the development of the contents stored in this database by giving their suggestions or leaving their feedback on single entries. However, the impression I have is that these functions are still underdeveloped and a more interactive interface would certainly be beneficial to the involvement of more professionals.

The TERMit project of the University of Trieste is similar to the IATE database. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both systems in your opinion?

TERMit and IATE are both multilingual terminological databases developed mainly for translators and certainly this is not the only feature they have in common. However, there are also fundamental differences. As an academic project, TERMit includes terminological records compiled by both undergraduate and MA students of the Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies of the University of Trieste. Students can choose the area of knowledge and the other languages besides Italian (which is compulsory) they would like to analyse. Given that students are encouraged to find a topic of their interest and that sometimes the Department receives external requests for terminological collections on a particular topic by organisations and companies, which are then compiled by students, the project comprises a wide variety of subjects, ranging from sports (e.g. women's artistic gymnastics), medicine (e.g. logopedy), architecture (e.g. Gothic architecture), law (e.g. restorative justice), just to name some of the topics covered by the students I have supervised. Every student works on the basis of a terminographic record template, which is very detailed and comprehensive, since it is subdivided into several fields for linguistic and conceptual information meant especially for translators, but possibly very useful also for technical writers and interpreters. The other distinguishing features of TERMit are that it enables cross-references with

conceptually related records and allows a potentially infinite list of synonyms and variants. However, given that the database is a compilation of terminographic studies carried out by students and that every study has its own main topic and languages, it is impossible to ensure a consistent level of quality, even if every single record is validated by at least two supervisors and possibly by an expert before publication. Students are encouraged and expected to delve into the topic they have chosen and to become almost field experts themselves and I dare proudly say that they often surprise me with the knowledge they acquire and the confidence they display after spending some months searching for information and trying to give sense to what initially seems impenetrable jargon.

IATE, on the other hand, was initially developed for being populated by terminographers and translators within the European institutions, that is, users who probably have a different background and needs as compared to BA and MA students as well as more working experience than students. The ideal situation envisaged by IATE developers was also to have terminological records containing translation equivalents in all the EU official languages, although this is very demanding task to accomplish. As compared to TERMit, then, IATE usually covers more languages in a single record (our students generally work with Italian plus one or two languages from their curriculum), but the information provided is not necessarily as detailed as the one provided by TERMit database. To give you an example, the definition field in TERMit records is compulsory in all the languages included in the terminographic study, while in IATE there may be records containing equivalents in many different languages but no definition. There are two more disadvantages that I encountered while using IATE for my own research projects in legal terminology. The first is that, based on the information provided in some records, it is not always possible to recognise the multifaceted nature of terminology. Nowadays it is indisputable that terminology can be approached from different standpoints, and therefore the results of terminographic tasks may lead to different results, but there is also substantial evidence of the dynamics of terminology. Due to the huge amount of information contained in IATE, I suppose the resources are insufficient to keep up-to-date all the data stored in it and to devote the time necessary to go into as much detail as our students do when working on their dissertations. Therefore, looking at legal terminology, in some cases I find it difficult to distinguish between the different layers that are hidden into a single term. In other words, in my ideal terminological knowledge base information is arranged in such a way so as to allow the end user to understand whether the term is used to refer to a national concept or a concept developed by European institutions. Having said that, what I really appreciate of IATE is its availability and visibility.

As a teacher, you have worked in many domains related to Translation, which challenges or difficulties in terms of terminology do you think that students have to face?

As an instructor of terminology and terminography and of translation from English into Italian at the Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies of the University of Trieste, I have noticed that terminology in itself, especially in early undergraduate years, but also later on in the course of study, is generally seen as a marginal subject or a time-consuming activity that, let's face it, needs to be done only to pass the exams. This is probably due to the naïve idea that, contrary to other types of lexicon, in languages for special purposes absolute equivalence between terms is the norm, while we know it is often nothing but an ideal. In my own experience, what I have found most surprising is that students need plenty of time to get into the habit of thinking in terms of abstract representations, of distinguishing between the meaning that underlies a linguistic expression and the linguistic expression itself. Although nowadays in terminology concepts are not considered of the utmost importance – as they were at the beginning of modern terminology in the 1970s – and it is virtually impossible to draw a clear-cut line between concepts and terms, when you look for the most appropriate translation equivalent it is almost always necessary to take a step back from the linguistic form and try to deeply understand the meaning or the single semantic features of a term. While this is a routine activity for a professional translator or terminographer, for a student it may require relatively long training and plenty of exercise.

How do computer tools help terminology management today?

Nowadays anything related to terminology simply can't do without computers. Just think of professional translators. Computers are a constant in the translation process, which in many cases involves the use of computer-assisted translation tools. Resorting to the internet is almost unavoidable for finding all the necessary information and delivering a high quality product. No matter what the topic of a specialised translation is, there is always need for translation equivalents of technical terms and, in order to keep their productivity high, translators have no other choice than finding the most suitable tool for keeping trace of the 'discoveries' they make while looking for the right term. Of course there is no terminology management tool that suits the needs of every single translator, let alone every person working in technical writing, media or communication. And the same holds true for the type of business you work for or the kind of project you are working on. A big company having to produce user's manuals in several languages and guarantee consistency in the usage of certain terms throughout their product line cannot rely on the good memory skills of their technical writers and will probably rely on either a commercial

computer-based terminology management tool or a tool specifically developed for the company's needs. On the other hand, a freelance translator dealing with a highly technical document that is no longer than half a page will most certainly think twice before creating a glossary or terminographic records for that specific project. Anyway, the huge amount of information available makes the recording and management of terminological data in electronic format an almost unavoidable activity in several professional settings. And the variety of terminology management tools, whether commercial or not, seems to be increasing.

The interviewer:

Silvia Piparo

Silvia was born in Sardinia, Italy, and became interested in foreign languages since she was a little girl. She then moved to Trieste were she got her BA in Applied Interlinguistic Communication in 2009 and her MA in Translation and Interpretation in 2013. Before that, she spent a year in the University of Heidelberg, Germany between 2012 and 2013, where she became interested in Terminology and started writing her MA Dissertation, a comparison of legal terms between German and Italian.

She has worked as a freelance translator and interpreter since her graduation and joined the Terminology Unit of the EP for a traineeship from October 2014 to March 2015 willing to acquire new competencies in the field of the terminology research and management.