The Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union: Purpose and activities

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Summary
The Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union was established in 1994 to meet the translation needs of the other decentralized Community agencies. It also participates in the Interinstitutional Committee for Translation and Interpretation, which is working to promote collaboration between the services of the various European institutions and agencies and to achieve economies of scale in the translation field.

In this paper, we describe the "raison d'être" of this agency, which is governed by European public law, with legal personality, and which has its own financial resources constituted by the transfers from the European agencies, offices and institutions in exchange for services provided. We focus on its cooperation with 56 EU institutions and bodies located in 22 European countries, a cooperation which involves a number of linguistic activities in a wide spectrum of subject fields, ranging from drugs and medicines to maritime security or chemicals, education, railways, food safety and intellectual property (through its translation of Community trademarks and designs for its biggest client, the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market).

We also discuss the terminological activities carried out at the Translation Centre, focusing more specifically on the compilation of terminological glossaries for the Centre's clients, as well as on the IATE interinstitutional terminological database.

1 Introduction

The Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union is established in Luxembourg and was created on 28 November 1994 as a rational response to the translation needs of a large number of European agencies and offices. It is an agency governed by European public law, with legal personality. It has its own financial resources constituted by the transfers from the European agencies, offices and institutions in exchange for services provided.

The first European agencies date from the 1970s. They were created in response to a desire for geographical devolution and the need to cope with new tasks of a technical and/or scientific nature.

Since the start-up of its activities in 1995, the Centre has gradually organised its services and administrative procedures and strengthened its operational capacity to respond to the increased workload. By way of comparison, the number of pages translated amounted to 812 370 pages in 2010. This rapid growth in activities has gone hand in hand with an increase in the Centre's staff, which now numbers over 210 staff members, who work with a network of hundreds of freelance translators (since a significant portion of the translations is outsourced to freelancers and revised internally). It sees its clients as partners in an endeavour to provide European citizens with correct and readable information in their official languages.

At present (August 2011), the Translation Centre has cooperation agreements with 56 EU institutions and bodies located in 22 European countries. The list of clients includes the following agencies, which gives an idea of the range of topics the translators deal with (the exhaustive list of clients can be found on http://cdt.europa.eu/EN/clients/Pages/default.aspx):

OHIM (Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market – Trade Marks and Designs), located in Alicante (Spain)
ECHA (European Chemicals Agency), located in Helsinki (Finland)
EMA (European Medicines Agency), located in London (UK)
ERA (European Railway Agency), located in Valenciennes (France)
EMSA (European Maritime Security Agency), located in Lisbon (Portugal)
EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addictions), located in Lisbon (Portugal)
ETF (European Training Foundation), located in Torino (Italy)
EFSA (European Food Safety Agency), located in Parma (Italy)
EASO (European Asylum Support Office), an agency located in Malta which was created in 2010 and became operational in June 2011
FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency), located in Vienna (Austria)
ACER (Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators), located in Ljubljana (Slovenia)
…

In 2011, the Centre signed a service level agreement with several new agencies, including the three new European Supervisory Authorities (ESAs), which are part of the network of the European System of Financial Supervisors. The European Banking Authority (EBA, London), the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA, Francfort) and the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA, Paris) will now turn to the Translation Centre for the provision of translation services.

The Translation Centre translates into and from the 23 official EU languages, but also from and into non-EU languages such as Norwegian, Arabic, Turkish, Croatian, Serbian, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, etc. Norway being a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), it is not surprising that a number of documents produced by European agencies and institutions should be translated into Norwegian, which comes at the top of the list of non-EU languages into which the Translation Centre translates.

The Alicante-based OHIM mentioned above is the Centre's biggest client. The OHIM is the official trade marks and designs registration office of the European Union and it provides protection for Intellectual Property Rights throughout the European Union. The Translation Centre produced over half a million pages of translations for this agency in 2010. Trade marks are very special documents to translate and pose a number of terminological problems, since they are most often highly technical descriptions which are usually made up of series of noun phrases only. Besides community trademarks and designs, the Centre mainly translates cutting-edge technical reports, medical and scientific opinions, legal texts, financial, accounting and budgetary documents, annual activity reports, work plans and strategic plans.

2 Organisation

The Translation Centre comprises the Director's Office and five departments (Translation, Translation Support, Administration, IT and General Affairs departments). The Translation

Department accounts for half of the Centre's staff and is divided into four language groups, each led by a Head of Language Group. Each language group is in turn divided into translation teams, one for each official language of the European Union. The Centre resorts extensively to freelancers and slightly more than 50% of translations are outsourced (especially for very technical subject areas). All externally translated texts are revised internally.

The Translation Centre offers a range of linguistic products and services, including: translation, amendments and modifications of texts, revision of already translated texts, editing and proofreading services (for non-native speakers who author documents in foreign languages), standardization and terminology work (term bases and term lists).

To deal with the very big volumes of texts sent by its clients, the Translation Centre resorts to a pool of freelance translators and translation companies with whom it has framework contracts or specific contracts. Framework contracts are signed with freelancers who are the successful candidates of calls for tenders (published on the Centre's web site – http://cdt.europa.eu and on http://ted.europa.eu). In 2010, the Centre used 1562 framework contracts. Besides the needs for translation of documents of a general nature, these contracts also cover the following specialized domains: law, maritime, railways, environment, chemistry, medicine and pharmacy, intellectual property rights.

3 IATE – Interactive Terminology for Europe

Understanding terminology, i.e. the specialized vocabulary that is used in a specific domain, is a key element in communication. No matter how much ones tries to say it simple, there will always be cases where an exact technical term says it best. This is especially true – and challenging – in the case of translation: not only is it necessary to understand a text – its exact meaning also has to be reproduced as faithfully as possible in another language. It is thus not surprising that the EU's translation services have always dedicated a lot of attention to the collection and organization of terminology in their official languages. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, some services, like the European Commission and the Council, had implemented terminology databases of their own, without choosing off-the-shelf products, but had developed new systems that suited their needs and working methods (Eurodicautom, TIS – see, for instance, Fontenelle and Mergen 1998 and Reichling 1998). Other services, like the European Parliament and the Translation Centre, used market products and adapted them to their needs, i.e. by defining data structures that reflected their requirements (EuroTerms, Euterpe). Many smaller services didn't have any formal terminology arrangements, i.e. translators would use bi-lingual MS Word or MS Excel files to record terminology they found helpful.

Today, terminologists and translators around the world are familiar with the IATE terminological database, which has been operational in the EU's translation services since 2004 and was opened to the public in June 2007 (http://iate.europa.eu). This public launch was the last step in a long development process that aimed to provide citizens with a simple, easy-to-use tool that would help them to better understand terminology in the 23 official languages of the Union. IATE was initially launched in 1999 by the Translation Centre, which is today managing the technical aspects of the project on behalf of the project partners (European Commission, Council, European Parliament, European Court of Auditors, European Economic and Social Committee/Committee of the Regions, Translation Centre, Court of Justice, European Investment Bank, European Central Bank). Basically, IATE can be

seen as the shared terminology database of all existing terminology collections (Eurodicautom, TIS, Euterpe…) of the translation services of all EU institutions and bodies. Translators and terminologists from these European translation services consult the database, but they also add about 200 terms and modify and validate around 250 daily. Today, the IATE database contains roughly 8.5 million terms, including approximately 560 000 abbreviations and 130 000 phrases, and covers all 23 official EU languages (as well as data in Latin, especially for plant and animal species and for medical terms).

IATE addresses some of the most burning issues which EU institutions face on a daily basis: it provides a single point of access to all relevant terminology and it allows terminologists and translators to share and jointly manage their own terminology. Two web services used internally are especially useful in this respect: the first one makes it possible to look up words in IATE directly from an MS Word document. The second one makes it possible to directly add terms to IATE from MS Word.

IATE can be searched for specific terms or abbreviations in a given source language and for its equivalent in any one of the 22 other languages (or even in all of them). The user can refine a search by specifying the domain or context in which a term is used. Terms in IATE have a very standard data structure. A given terminological record includes language-independent information (e.g. domain, domain note, cross-reference, origin…) and, for each language, a definition formulated in that language, together with possible comments. Search results indicate the institution that created the entry and the context in which the term was used. A term and possible synonyms are associated with each language and definition, with optional information about grammar, context, term type (acronym…), reliability, obsolescence, etc (see Figures 1 and 2 below). This metadata is crucial to guide translators in their daily work, since official terminology in a given field may change rapidly and a term that is used today may become deprecated tomorrow. A term such as "Mexican influenza virus" is a case in point: commonly used at the beginning of the epidemic in 2009, this term is now tagged as deprecated in favour of "influenza A(H1N1) virus", as is shown on Figure 4. Entries also have a reliability code, four stars meaning that the term is "very reliable", one star meaning "reliability not verified".

Figure 1: query on the English term 'stress test' in IATE (filtering on the "FINANCE" domain), specifying that translations into German (de), French (fr), Dutch (nl) and Swedish (sv) should be displayed

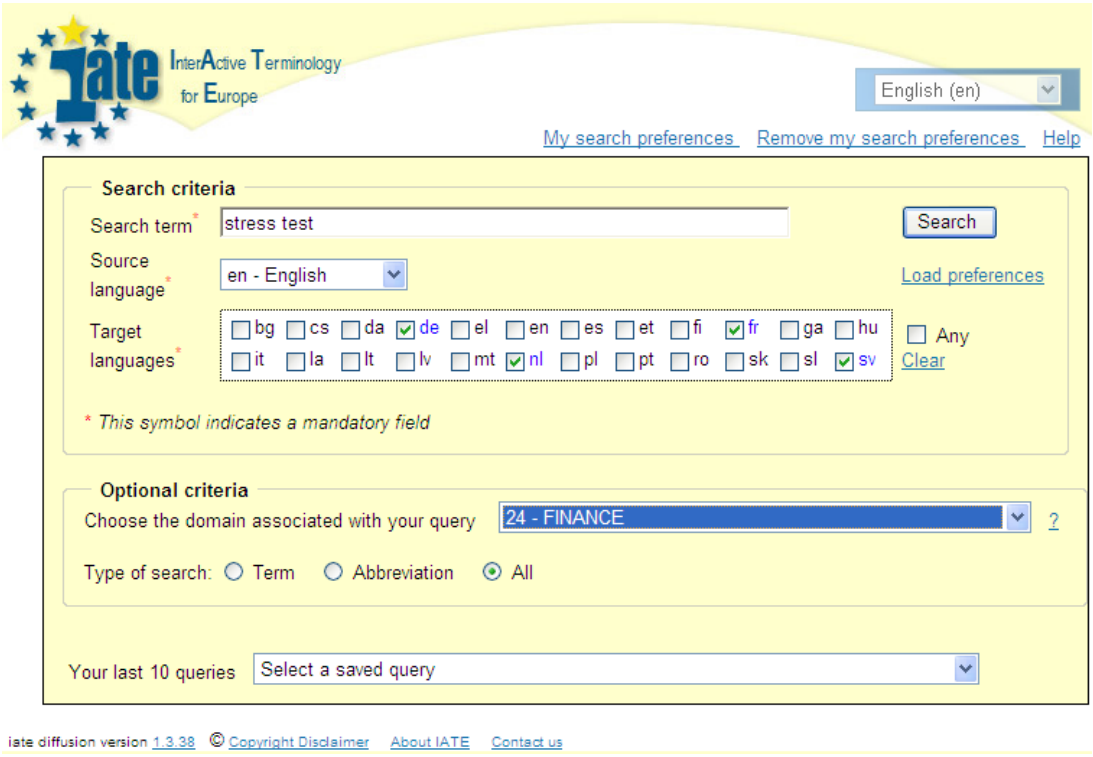


Figure 1: Query on the term 'stress test'

The query above generates the following output (July 2011):

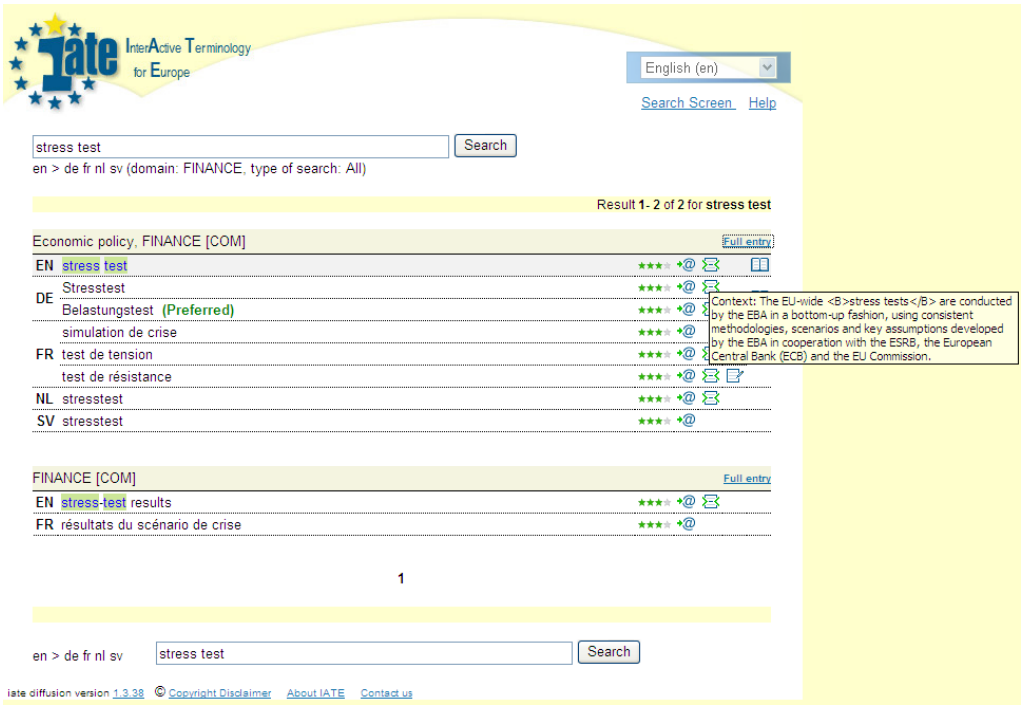


Figure 2: Output of query on the term 'stress test' (July 2011)

Expanding query on the English term‘stress test’

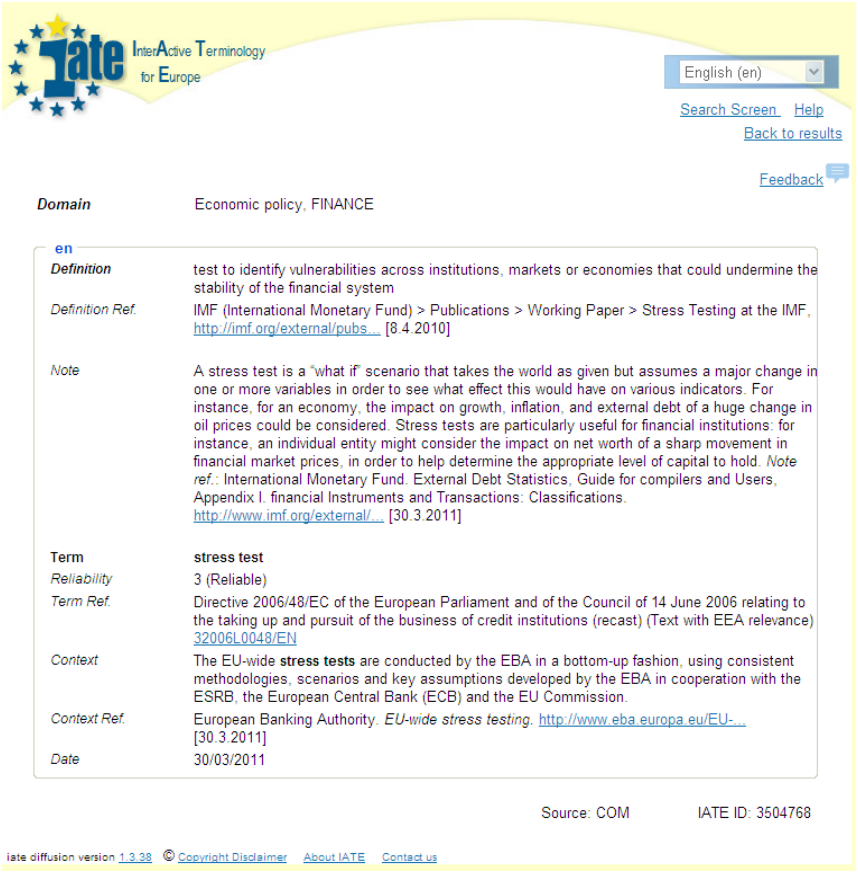
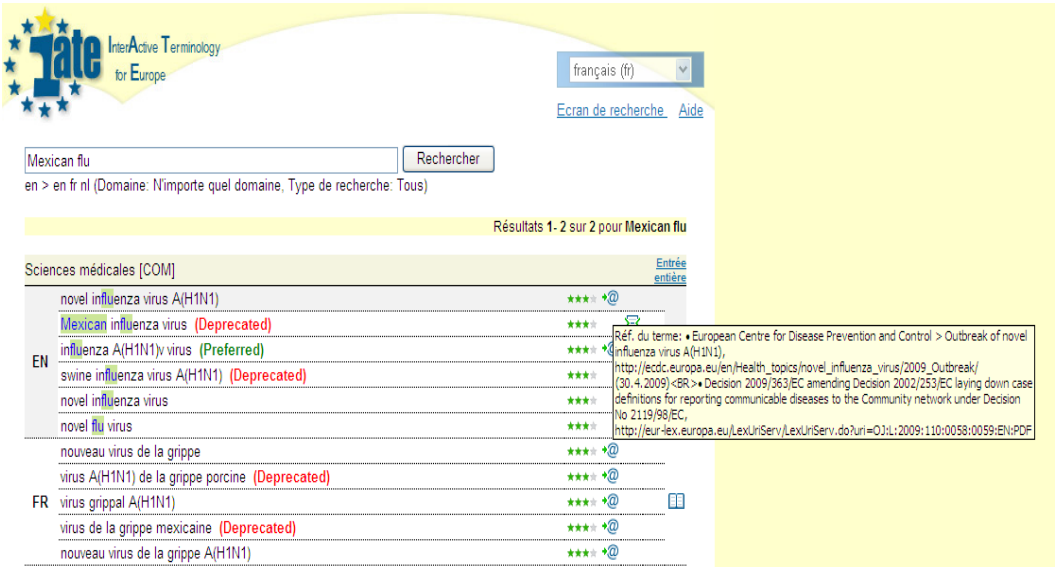


Figure 3. expanding on the English term‘stress test’

Figure 4: Metadata in IATE (“deprecated”, “preferred”...)



Of course, IATE is far from being a perfect tool. The most obvious problem is the language coverage. Languages of member states that joined after 2004 are less well represented than

the "older" languages. This means that the history of successive enlargements of the EU is reflected in the breakdown of the number of terms per language, English, French and German each boasting over one million terms when languages such as Maltese or Estonian have fewer than 30,000 terms.

In some cases, incomplete or erroneous metadata makes it harder for the user to find what she is looking for, which is sometimes akin to looking for a needle in a haystack.

The issue of duplicates is also often a problem and a significant amount of time is spent every year on identifying and removing duplicates, since more (terms) is not always better. Despite these issues, which may be sources of legitimate frustration, IATE is considered a reliable database which serves a highly useful purpose. Its public site serves around 270,000 queries a day (i.e. over 70 million queries per year). These queries are received from over 170 different countries, which clearly shows that IATE's usefulness extends far beyond the borders of the European Union.

4 Terminological projects

Besides managing the IATE database on behalf of the project partners, the Translation Centre is involved in a number of terminological projects for its clients. It regularly prepares glossaries for EU Agencies based on terminology coming from EU legislation and terminology prepared by National Focal Points. ECHA-Term, for instance, is a terminology project managed by the Translation Centre on behalf of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA, based in Helsinki). ECHA-term contains the main REACH[1] and CLP[2] terms in 22 EU language, including the CLP pictograms, hazards and precautionary statements and some substances of very high concern. The glossary currently includes over 700 multilingual entries with search, export, feedback and user registration functionalities, as well as editing, validation and history features.

The ECHA-term project was launched at the end of 2008, in response to ECHA's wish to provide the EU public with a multilingual tool that would ensure the correct use of REACH and CLP related terminology. In addition, such a database was also seen as a way of improving the quality of translations and establishing the basis for harmonised multilingual communication involving specialised vocabulary across the EU. The beta version, which is open to the public, was launched in mid-2011 and is accessible at the following address: http://echa.cdt.europa.eu.

5 Conclusion

The Translation Centre plays an important role in the implementation of the EU's multilingual policy, via the hundreds of thousands of pages it translates every year for its 56 clients and via the various terminology projects it is involved in. It is a truly multilingual agency. Its staff, from all Member States of the EU, makes for a colourful community, and translators share their offices with colleagues of a different nationality. Naturally, the Centre translates from and into all official languages of the EU, but when the needs of the clients require it, it also manages translations from and into languages like Norwegian, Farsi or Cantonese, for

[1] REACH stands for the Regulation concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals. The REACH regulation entered into force on 1 June 2007 and is intended to streamline and improve the legislative framework for chemicals in the European Union.

[2] The CLP Regulation is the new European Regulation on Classification, Labelling and Packaging of substances and mixtures. It deals with the hazards of chemical substances and mixtures and how to inform other about them.

example. As the scope of work of the EU agencies ranges from transport and energy through research and chemicals to property rights, finance and consumer protection, the Centre translates a wide variety of documents. What it produces becomes part of everyday life for the people of the EU. To conclude, allow me to quote Karl-Johan Lönnroth, former Chairman of the Translation Centre's Management Board and former Director General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation, who, on the occasion of the Translation Centre's 15th anniversary in November 2010, wrote:

> Multilingualism in this context means the need for citizens to be able to understand and communicate with each other amidst this diversity and complexity. […] Where the linguistic skills of the citizens prove insufficient, the translators take over. They ensure the transparency, legitimacy and efficiency of the European Union. This is their ultimate objective. The language services are thereby a guardian of the functioning of this multilingual experiment of the EU – which is unique in the world.

References

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