PhD Abstracts

**Terms in context: a corpus-based analysis of the terminology of the European Union’s development cooperation policy with the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states**

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A significant amount of legal terminology is incorporated in international and/or multilateral agreements, drawn up by and between states as well as regional and international organisations. While the complexity of such agreements can be enormous, with implications for the contracting parties being both
far-reaching and of long duration, the terminology used in these texts often remains rather fuzzy and vague.

This thesis investigates the terminology used in the European Union’s development cooperation agreements. Arts and Dickson (2004) describe the EU’s development cooperation policy as an ‘understudied area of European politics, despite its economic and political significance’ (2004: 3). Indeed, research in this area appears to be less extensive than one would expect in consideration of the fact that development cooperation represents one of the Union’s first common policies (Lister 1997: 22). The EU’s development cooperation policy arose from the colonial history of some of its member states, particularly France. Whereas nowadays the EU is active in virtually every part of the world, the relationship with a group of countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific was incorporated into the Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957. The EU’s close ties with these states were maintained via several Conventions: two Yaoundé Conventions in the 1960s and four Lomé Conventions in the 1970s and 1980s. These ties are currently enshrined in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which was signed in 2000. Both the concrete legal concepts and the respective terms applied have been subject to continuous change, since they were strongly influenced by the political and economic situation at the time.

The official texts, protocols and declarations produced in the meetings between the EU and the developing countries were used to compile ten text corpora, each of which represents a particular stage in the relationship between the two groups of countries. A corpus-based approach to terminology was chosen as it opens up the possibility to gather both conceptual and linguistic as well as usage information about the terminological units (Sager 1990: 133). The use of corpora in terminology work, also referred to as corpus-based terminology, may have lagged behind its use in lexicography, yet its benefits are remarkable (Bowker 1996: 31). The study shows that tools and techniques developed in corpus linguistics can assist terminologists throughout a terminology project, both in the early stages when the key issues are to identify term candidates and to provide evidence for and about term candidates, as well as in the core stages when the main tasks are to compile definitions and to select contextual examples. The analysis is supported by the lexical analysis software WordSmith Tools, which allows the generation of key words and word clusters, thus enabling the identification of the main concepts involved. In order to arrive at relevant and meaningful results several pragmatic choices have had to be made, in particular with a view to the increasing number of lexical units that lack informative value and/or overlap to a certain extent. Along the lines of Mahlberg, (2007) who establishes so-called functional groups in order to describe different aspects of meaning in textual contexts (2007:
the word clusters identified by WordSmith Tools are divided into several categories, each of which characterises a particular theme prevailing in the corpus texts. Despite being a rough approach to analysing clusters, this step facilitates the identification of the main characteristics and themes of the underlying texts and makes it easier to grasp the plurality of terms appearing in the corpus. Moreover, the establishment of groups enables a focused view of the various word clusters and assists in raising issues and questions that otherwise would not have come to mind. Unlike Mahlberg (2007), where the interest lies in features of discourse rather than terminology, this study focuses on the categorisation of those multi-word units that can be considered to have a separate meaning and appear – to varying extents – useful from a terminological angle. Thus, the term functional group has been replaced with the expression terminological domain.

The analysis of the corpora shows the evolution of the terminology since the establishment of a common European development cooperation policy. It reveals the increasing number of legal expressions that seem to be random and ill-conceived. Certain topics dealt with in the agreements are characterised by particularly rich vocabulary, with several different words for what we can only assume actually represents the same concept. These words can be considered synonyms or quasi-synonyms, which are more or less used interchangeably. What is more, the cooperation agreements lack clear and precise definitions of key terms. Information tends to be scattered throughout the texts, sometimes even hidden in protocols and declarations attached to the main text of the agreements, which makes it difficult to get a clear picture of the concepts involved.

Moreover, the study clearly proves the influence of the colonial past of some of the EU’s member states on the terminology used in the agreements. Prior to the first Lomé Convention (1975), the relationship between the Community and the developing countries was referred to as an Association. The developing countries were called the ‘the non-European countries and territories which have special relations with Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands’ or simply the ‘countries and territories’ in the Treaty of Rome (European Communities 1957: Article 131) and the ‘States associated with the Community’ or simply ‘Associated States’ in the Yaoundé Conventions (European Communities 1969: Preamble). Thus, the dependency of the developing countries and the asymmetry in the power relations were reflected in the language. Only in 1975 did the developing countries create the African, Caribbean and Pacific, or ACP, group of states, having been referred to as the ACP states ever since. They gave themselves a legal existence and a sense of identity. They were no longer defined in terms of their relationship to the Europeans, but perceived as an independent entity that was on an equal footing with the Community.
Finally, the diachronic analysis of the EU’s development cooperation agreements also reveals the increasing complexity of the rules, programmes and instruments used and the terminology associated with them. While the Conventions built on the provisions of their respective predecessors, each one introduced at least one specific feature – a new instrument, a fresh initiative or an innovative idea. The increase in the level of detail and sophistication had an enormous impact on the terminology involved, in terms of both quantity and quality. As the areas of cooperation grew, so did the tools and methods applied, and, of course, the linguistic means to express these ideas.

References


