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STUMBLING BLOCKS IN THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH ROAD TRAFFIC TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract

Under the conditions of a rapid increase in the number of vehicles and the extension of the European Union borders, the investigation of road traffic terminology acquires vital importance, as language has always been a means of reflecting non/specialized realities and phenomena. The aim of this study was to investigate the difficulties and challenges met in the translation of English road traffic terms into Romanian. The objectives included providing an overview of the concept of specialized language and terms, as well as investigating the nature and characteristics of specialized translation of a selected corpus of English road traffic terms using functional (conceptual reference), semantic (mono/polysemantism as well as homonymy), structural (simple, compound, derivative, and term combinations), and translational approaches. The findings of this study suggest the necessity of the original road traffic term's profound analysis in the pre-translation stage, focusing on the purpose, communicative situation, requirements, and function of the translated terminological unit.

Keywords: specialized language, road traffic terminology, referential function, translation strategies, borrowing, calque, grammatical transformations, terminological polysemy, homonymy

INTRODUCTION

In modern linguistics, there exists a considerable body of literature both on the notion of specialized translation and on its various aspects dealing with translation methodology, terminology, lexical and grammatical challenges, etc. The majority of works on the subject, however, focus on explaining general theoretical issues in the interpretation of either the specialized vocabulary and terminology and translation as a linguistic phenomenon or with the empirical study of terminology in certain branches such as law, economy, medicine, etc. In particular, no study, to our knowledge, has considered the problem of determining the challenges and procedures

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involved in the translation of road traffic terminology from English into Romanian. Road traffic terminology is a unique subject of investigation as it is characterized by a wide range of everyday users compared to other specialized vocabularies (drivers and pedestrians are representatives of different professions). According to recent statistics, more than 32,7 million vehicles were registered on the road in the United Kingdom in 2020, the total number of road vehicles registered in Romania exceeded 8 million units (nearly 7.3 million of which were cars), and the Republic of Moldova's official data referred to more than 1 million vehicles in 2021 [15]. It is a massive amount of transportation, and the number is growing, while adhering to and respecting road safety rules is becoming vitally important (just remember safety slogans like "Stop accidents before they stop you!"; "Overspeed is a knife that cuts a life!"; "Alert today - Alive tomorrow!" and so on) [14].

Researching the systems of road traffic terms and concepts in English and Romanian is challenging, as one has to deal not only with the terms themselves but also with different driving systems. There are divergences between the Romanian and Moldovan road rules *Codul Rutier*, the American Road Code, and the British *Highway Code* at the terminology level. Considering that traffic rules diverge and vary from country to country (e.g., left-hand traffic in the UK and right-hand traffic in the countries of the EU), it is imperative for future translators and interpreters to know and abide by the culture of other English-speaking countries. In addition, the future integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union would mean a greater need for specialists and translators in all fields, including in the automotive domain.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to perform a comparative English-Romanian translation analysis of road traffic vocabulary. The objectives can be restated in the light of present-day terminological and translational science: to overview the notion of specialized vocabulary as the key component of special text and its translation issues; to determine the importance of road traffic vocabulary as a lifesaving language; to identify the most common ways and difficulties in translating English terms into Romanian (on the basis of the selected corpus).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last decades, a large number of alternative theories to the nature of specialized languages and their components have been developed within the framework of translation studies. Michele Cortellazzo claims that specialized languages represent a natural language functional variety dependent on a field of knowledge or a sphere of professional activity, used by a group of speakers to satisfy the communication needs (primarily the referential ones) of that specialized field [3, p. 8]. M.T. Cabré refers to special languages as the "subsets of language that are pragmatically characterized by three variables: subject field, type of users, and type of situation in which communication takes place" [1, p.65]. When applied to the investigated domain, the subject field is represented by road traffic as a system of specialized knowledge itself: rules, signs, regulations, etc. constitute the object of a specific learning process, e.g., driving license is issued upon successful completion of special theoretical and practical courses (for drivers), while road traffic rules constitute the subject of an educational program for pedestrians (primary and secondary education institutions). The participants in road traffic (drivers, pedestrians, officials, and so on) are the category of users (both originators and recipients, according to Cabré's classification). The communicative situation deals with the organization of traffic, i.e., a set of legal, organizational, and technical means and administrative actions to control traffic on the roads.

Previous studies have emphasized that correctness, objectivity, and accessibility are the basic qualities of specialized languages. In specialized communication, where literary variants of language systems are preferred, which is also distinguished by clarity and precision and is devoid of emotional charge, the emphasis is placed on the communication of specialized notions, knowledge, ideas, facts, etc. (e.g., driving rules, obligations of the participants in road traffic, legal issues, etc.) [12, p.192]. Tables, diagrams, photos, etc. are often used to facilitate accessibility and comprehension (e.g., almost all road traffic printed/online didactic materials include pictures of various road situations to visualize the exposed information). According to M.T. Cabré, illustrations are iconic units that reproduce the idea that individuals (e.g., future drivers, pedestrians) have of a certain class of objects (e.g., crossroad priorities) in the real world (i.e., road traffic situations) [1, p.10]. Signs, symbols, and figures (e.g., road signs, road

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surface markings, etc.) are integral parts of the road traffic conceptual representation system. The Highway Code regulates communication between road users, but there are also implicit communication laws. Road signs are a form of communication that dictate a specific interaction system that people on the roads should be aware of. In the same vein, Uwen maintains, that road traffic signs, are viewed as agents of a communicative system whose conversational participants are the signs, which play the social role of the addressers [20]. To Jolayemi and Olayemi, quoted by Uwen, though road traffic signs are non-linguistic symbols, they constitute the "linguistic landscape to communicate intended information in the form of instructions. warnings, directions, (and other messages) to road users" [in 20, p.1]. To illustrate the statement, the stop sign (the word "STOP" reproduced in white on a red background) is a traffic control device that warns drivers to slow down and prepare to stop (i.e., referential function). Lane adjustments in rush-hour traffic flow circumstances in particular not only involve communication with one's own targets but also cooperation with other participants in road traffic. A good example of road surface marking is a white circular sign with a single black diagonal stripe through it that indicates that the national speed limit is in effect on the next stretch of road.

Recent studies suggest that specialized languages appropriate to a professional activity have not only their own terms but also rules for organizing the linguistic statement. They produce various specialized texts with a certain degree of difficulty, constituting an obstacle to text comprehension (especially for non-specialists). The causes of the complications can be found in several aspects: the high level of specialized text structure, the use of frequently difficult terminology (foreign words, neologisms, borrowings, etc.), the emergence of terms' nominalization and/or the term "determinologisation," which specifically complicate the issue of readability and message comprehension as well as translation [12, p.191]. Moreover, any specialized text follows conventional formats. In the field of road traffic, they may be represented by vehicle and trailer registration documents, certificates for specialist vehicle approvals, goods vehicle operator licenses, haulage licenses or permits needed for the journey, vehicle insurance, green cards, etc.

Despite the fact that specialized translation literature has developed dramatically in recent years, there is little consensus about what specialized

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translation actually means. E. Croitoru states that translations focus on the decoding of the message as a receptor, as it implies an understanding of the peculiarities of technical and scientific discourse while encoding it for other receptors involves "the use of adequate terminology, knowledge of the problems, phenomena, processes, etc. dealt with, and collaboration with the specialist in the field" [4, p.22]. In the present article, we will follow the definition provided by the Romanian linguist S. Postolea, who considers that "specialized translation deals with any text produced within or referring to a specialist field of knowledge or activity, regardless of its intended readership or purpose" [13, p.56.] Due to the informative purpose of specialized texts, the translator's concern is for clarity, precision, and effectiveness in the transmission of referential messages, focusing on the specificity of vocabulary, grammar structure, stylistic characteristics, and pragmatic aspects of the source and target languages.

It has commonly been assumed that any translator performing a specialized translation should take into consideration some parameters: the purpose (specialized translation is a means of study, training, explanation, or information distribution); the target audience (answering the questions "who?" and "how?", i.e., who will use this information and in what way; the criterion seems important in the light of stylistic choices performed by the translator, as M.T. Cabré specifies, "every text is adapted to the characteristics of the interlocutors and their level of knowledge about the topic" [1, p.47]); the subject matter (general theoretical skills of the translator in the domain and adequate comprehension of the concepts and vocabulary used); following conventions involves consulting similar layouts and the use of terminology (the translation has to be in the forms that a native reader of the target language would use) [ibidem].

Therefore, in the light of Hatim's postulate, the translator as communicator pursues to preserve coherence by keeping the corresponding balance between what is effective and what is efficient in a specific setting (e.g., road traffic situations), for a certain intention (e.g., safe driving, safe road crossing), and for a specific target audience (e.g., drivers, pedestrians, officials) [7, p.10].

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METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

This study has applied mixed research methods to identify problems in the translation of English road traffic vocabulary into Romanian. There will be a combination of traditional corpus-analysis methodology and modern semantic, structural, and functional conceptual frameworks in translation studies. For this investigation, we analyzed the data collected from the official web pages of The Highway Code of the UK and the other ones dealing with traffic regulations, as well as some driving forums have been used [11], [16], [17], [18], [19]. The Highway Code of the UK is a set of information, advice, guides, and mandatory rules for road users in the United Kingdom. The Highway Code was first published in 1931 and is regularly updated to reflect current practices. It is prepared by the Department for Transport and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, and is printed by the Stationery Office in electronic form and as a printed book. The aim of the Highway Code is to promote safety on the road while also supporting a healthy, sustainable, and efficient transport system [21].

The compiled corpus consists of 200 English road traffic terms selected by the method of continuous sampling and translated by the author into Romanian. The following stages were taken in the mixed translational and analytical approach to the road traffic terminological corpus: choosing bibliographical sources as a corpus for tracking; compiling a corpus of road traffic terminology; searching for conceptual analogies in Romanian; checking the accuracy of findings and the translation methods used; and confirming term functionality in specialized text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding terminology rendering from SL into TL, Gómez G González-Jover (quoted by Postolea) states that "in translation, it is specialized terms that pose fewer problems to the translator, and, moreover, they are often documented in specialized dictionaries, glossaries, or scientific and technical texts, and they can even be standardized" [in 13, p.56]. It seems that this understanding of the terminology translation framework is questionable. Vocabulary matching often does not provide a correct idea of the lexical unit, since similar terms in two languages may have different concepts or different meanings of closely related concepts. This idea is supported by M.T. Cabré,

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who affirms that "on occasion, they [translators] have to find equivalents for those terms that are not listed in the available vocabularies nor in specialized data banks" [1, p.48]. The following part of this paper moves on to describe in detail the peculiarities of English road traffic terminology translation into Romanian, paying attention to the nature of the translation problem and the strategy applied. Note that term "procedure" has come to be used to refer to a specific technique used at a given point in a text [9, p.24].

One way of rendering road traffic terminology is borrowing, when the source language (SL) term is transferred directly to the target language (TL). According to Munday, this category covers words that are used in English and other languages to fill a semantic gap in the TL [9, p.89]. It is especially useful when two or more cultures come into contact as a result of technological advances. The vocabulary, as an adaptive system, is constantly the changing conditions of human (non)professional communication. The borrowed terms are taken from another language and adapted partially or fully to English standards in phonemic form, spelling, and grammatical paradigm. In some cases, the pronunciation of the term (foreign sounds, sound combinations, stress positions, etc.), its spelling and the assignment of sounds and letters are an indication of the foreign origin of the terms. The morphological structure of the term and its grammatical forms can also designate that the term was adopted. This has been observed in the case of road traffic terminological units such as chauffeur (Fr.) – sofer; chassis (Fr.) - şasiu, coupé (Fr.)- (maşină) coupe; piston (Fr.) -piston; cylinder (Gr./Lat)- cilindru, odometer (Lat./Fr.) - odometru, carburettor (Fr.)- carburator, tachometer (Gr.)- tahometru, airbag (En.) – airbag etc, e.g. A rear-facing baby seat must not be fitted into a seat protected by an active frontal airbag...[16, p. 63].- Nu amplasati sistemul de fixare pentru copii orientat spre spate în scaunul pasagerului din fată / în scaunul protejat de airbag-ul frontal activ.

An alternative strategy contributing to the adequate translation of English road traffic terms into Romanian is calque (loan translation). In loan translation, the SL components as such are retained, but they are literally translated. As R. Dimitriu mentions, calques are literal translations at the level of the phrase [6, p. 32]. Vinay and Darbelnet note that both borrowings and calques often become fully integrated into the TL, although sometimes with some semantic change, which can turn them into false friends [9, p.89].

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Basically, it's respecting the syntactical structures of the target language. This is evident in the case of terminological units such as wheel balancing – balansarea roţilor; wheel spin – axa roţilor; acceleration lane – bandă de accelerare; controlled crossing – intersecţie dirijată; deceleration lane - bandă de decelerare; lateral maneuver – manevră laterală; moving vehicle – vehicul în mişcare; parallel parking – parcare paralelă etc., e.g. Pedestrians have priority when on a zebra crossing, on a parallel crossing or at light controlled crossings [16, p.8]. - Pietonii au prioritate atunci când se află pe o trecere de pietoni, pe o trecere paralelă sau la intersecţiile dirijate de semafor.

To avoid insufficient literal translation (grammatically over-literal rendering), it is necessary to apply grammatical transformations in the process of translation into the TL. Grammar transformations involve a change in the grammatical properties of a word, word combination, or sentence in a translation and usually consist of transposition and syntactic transformation. Transposition is the process by which parts of speech change their paradigm when they are translated. Grammatical structures often differ between languages. As a result, translating a specific grammatical category from the SL to the TL frequently involves changing the morphological category. This can be illustrated by the contextual sentence below, where the English verbal forms getting, registering, insuring, taxing are translated into Romanian in the form of the nouns obtinerea, înregistrarea, asigurarea, achitarea, efectuarea, e.g.: These include getting a driving licence, registering, insuring and taxing your vehicle, and getting a MOT.- Aceste acțiuni includ: obținerea permisului de conducere, înregistrarea vehiculului, asigurarea și achitarea impozitelor rutiere si efectuarea reviziei tehnice.

Another example of what is meant by transposition is the verb *to park*, which is translated into Romanian as a verb (*a parca*), but also as a substantival syntagmatic unit *staţionarea maşinilor*, being formed by a combination of N+N, e.g. It is forbidden *to park* self-propelled cars at night on public roads. Pe timp de noapte, pe drumurile publice este interzisă *staţionarea maşinilor* autopropulsate.

The English verbal term to drive has been rendered into Romanian as a conduce o maşină/ a merge cu maşina as well as a substantival terminological combination deplasarea vehiculelor, with the structural components of the syntagm being two nouns, e.g. It is forbidden to drive with

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exceeded gauge limits, under reduced visibility conditions or at the glazed frost. – Se interzice *deplasarea vehiculelor* cu limitele de gabarit depășite, în condiții de vizibilitate redusă sau polei.

According to R. Dimitriu, transposition through expansion occurs when the meaning of a translated word appears incomplete and has to be backed by other terms [6, p.34]. Peter Newmark refers to the change of an SL noun group to a TL noun and so forth as shifts [10, p. 86]. In the selected corpus, this may be exemplified by the road traffic terms in the translation of which English derivative or compound terms are rendered in the TL by a terminological combination, e.g.: balancing (n)- balansarea roților, clearway (n.) – culoar de trecere (N+prep+N), contraflow (n.) - sistem/bandă contraflux (N+N), dashboard (n.)— tablou de bord (N+prep+N), e.g. Buses and/or cycles may have a contraflow lane [16, p.92]. -. Autobuzele și/sau bicicletele pot cicula pe o bandă contraflux. In case of air gauge (N+N) – manometru (n.) the reversed process is attested: terminological combination in the SL becomes a derivative term in the TL.

The procedure of explicitation is defined by Vinay and Darbelnet as "the process of introducing information into the target language which is present only implicitly in the source language, but which can be derived from the context" [in 6, p.35]. An example of this translation procedure application is the term *gap* borrowed from the common language and rendered into Romanian as "interval de timp sau distanță între vehicule pe șosea" [5], e.g. Do not cross until there is a safe *gap* in the traffic and you are certain that there is plenty of time [16, p.15].- Nu traversați strada până când nu există un *interval de timp suficient* (sigur).

Antonymous translation, defined as a translation mode whereby an affirmative (positive) element in the SL is translated by a negative element in the TL and, vice versa, a negative element in the SL is translated using an affirmative element in the TL, without changing the meaning of the original sentence [8, p.21]. To exemplify the term *fog lights/lamp* will be analyzed. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *a fog light/lamp* is "a bright light on a vehicle, used in fog or other conditions when it is difficult to see" [2], its Romanian equivalent being *faruri anticeață*. Recent researcher mentions that there is a direct interdependence between the type of negation and the type of antonymic translation [ibidem]. For example, in the case of morphological negation, determined by the existence of a negative affix in the SL (in

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English), antonymic translation takes the form of a positive replacement in the TL (in Romanian), and vice versa, e.g., You must not use front or rear *fog lights* unless visibility is seriously reduced [16, p.75]. - Nu trebuie să utilizați *faruri anticeață* față sau spate, cu excepția cazului în care vizibilitatea este redusă serios. Not to mention that a literal equivalent may be met in Romanian specialized literature as *far/lampă/lumină ceață*. Both negative and positive variants (translated using different strategies) function successfully in the specialized discourse of road traffic.

Another challenge encountered in the translation process is tightly connected to the rendering of polysemantic terms. Polysemy is a recognized feature of natural language in which one signifier corresponds to multiple signifieds. Considering polysemy as one of the most productive ways of extending a language's lexicon, M.T. Cabré points out that "the origin of the most polysemous terms is the analogy of one concept to another" [1, p.109]. Moreover, the prominent linguist emphasizes that "any term from a special field that is extracted by analogy and applied to another field will be a homonym" [1, p.111], referring to interdisciplinary homonymy. In cases of intradisciplinary polysemy, identical terms correspond to different notions having an etymological or semantic relationship within the same field.

Having defined what is meant by the relationship between polysemy and homonymy in terminology, we will move on to analyze some examples in translation. To start with, the term trunk, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, may have completely opposite meanings. In common parlance it refers to the thick main stem of a tree, from which its branches grow (Romanian trunchi, tulpină): a large, strong container that is used for storing clothes and personal possessions, often when travelling or going to live in a new place (Romanian valiză, cufăr de voiaj); the main part of a person's body, not including the head, legs, or arms (Romanian *corp*); an elephant's nose, which is like a long tube that bends easily (nasul elefantului); the oldfashioned form of a piece of men's clothing that covers the hips and bottom and the top part of the legs and is worn when swimming (translated as pantaloni scurti); etc [2]. In the field of driving, the term trunk designates "an enclosed compartment of a car for holding luggage, etc., usually at the rear" [2], the Romanian equivalent being portbagaj, e.g.: Trunk space is generous and the fold-down rear seats provide additional cargo capacity. -Spațiul portbagajului este generos, iar scaunele rabatabile din spate oferă o

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capacitate suplimentară de încărcare. The term can also be met as a constitutive component of terminological unit *trunk road* translated as *drum principal/ arteră principală de circulație*, e.g. [...] Officers have powers to stop vehicles on all roads, including motorways and *trunk roads*, in England and Wales [16, p.73]. – [...] ofițerii sunt autorizați să oprească vehiculele pe toate drumurile, inclusiv *pe autostrăzi și drumurile principale*, în Anglia și Tara Galilor.

Another term with multiple meanings in both general and specialized vocabulary is *junction*, which is defined as "a place where things, particularly roads and railroads, meet or join" [2]. On consulting the specialized definition in the "Ultimate Driving Terms Glossary", the term is explained as "an area where two or more roads come together; navigating junctions requires careful observation and clear signaling" [19] and is translated as intersecție, sometimes încrucișare, e.g.: Watch out for long vehicles which may be turning at a junction ahead [16, p.109] - Fiți atenți la vehiculele lungi care pot efectua un viraj la o intersectie din fată. Other Romanian terms for junction used in various fields of science include jonctiune (electricity), legătură (technology), confluentă (geography), îmbinare. (commerce), *lipitură* (metallurgy), etc. Hence, the translation issue of finding the proper target language equivalent can be solved by analyzing the specialized context of the utterance and the message expressed.

As mentioned before, there are cases when the term can be polysemantic in the framework of the same branch. One term to consider is *refuge*, which according to the Cambridge Dictionary means "a place that provides protection or shelter from danger, trouble, or unhappiness" [2] and is translated into Romanian as *refugiu*, e.g.: Hundreds of dissidents are seeking *refuge* in the US embassy. - Sute de dizidenți solicită *refugiu* la ambasada SUA. In the road traffic framework, the term "*refuge*" has several meanings. Here is the context, which has to be taken into account as it influences the meaning of a term and is linked to the environment in which the communication takes place. In translation, the context is very important: one term may denote a different concept depending on the context used. Thus, *refuge* in road traffic may denote "a small section of pavement, located in the middle of particularly busy roads, that provide a place for pedestrians to stand when they're halfway through crossing the road" [19], the Romanian equivalent being *insula de traffic/ insulă de calmare a traficului, refugiu*

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pietonal e.g.: When the crossings on each side of the central refuge are not in line, they are two separate crossings [16, p.23]. - Când trecerile de pe fiecare parte a refugiului pietonal central nu sunt în linie, se consider ca două treceri separate. The second meaning of refuge denotes an emergency lay-by installed along the side of a smart motorway. These are frequently referred to as emergency refuges, the Romanian equivalent being refugiu de urgentă or spațiu de parcare fortuită, e.g. Under the system, emergency refuge areas are built up to 1.5 miles apart to allow vehicles to pull off the road. – În cadrul sistemului, zonele de refugiu de urgență/spațiu de parcare fortuită sunt construite la o distantă de până la 1,5 mile una dintre ele pentru a permite vehiculelor să iasă de pe șosea. Road traffic terminology represents a code that is used by several categories of users (pedestrians, drivers, and officials). The terminological corpus under investigation does not represent a closed code, specialized knowledge merges with general knowledge, and polysemy in this field is a natural result of the diversification of texts and contexts in which this specialized language functions. That is the reason for the appearance of the third meaning of the term refuge found in one of the driving forums and referring to "a gap in a central reservation where vehicles can wait to turn right", the Romanian equivalent being spatiu pentru viraj, e.g. They had a couple of issues; the first is if someone is in the refuge waiting to complete their right turn... - Au avut câteva probleme; una este dacă cineva se află în spațiu pentru viraj, asteaptînd să-și completeze virajul la dreapta...

Consequently, in the specialized text, polysemantic terms do not represent an obstacle to the realization of referential and communicative functions. However, many terms borrowed from common or other specialized languages become components of compound terminological units, each with at least one determinant, allowing for semantic transparency at the paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper has highlighted the importance of adequate translation of specialized terminology in the field of road traffic. It has been demonstrated that an adequate specialized translation is a process that provides pragmatic translation act tasks at the highest level of equivalence to achieve the goal, the latter in the road traffic specialized vocabulary representing a correct

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translation of driving regulations in different languages, countries, and cultures.

To properly translate specialized terms, translators must go beyond single-term correspondences (terminological units and their correspondences have both paradigmatic and syntagmatic features) and be able to determine extralinguistic and inter/intralinguistic references to the entire scientific (road traffic) and language domain. Translation of various road traffic conventions (forms, rules, tools, and mechanisms) is necessary for understanding the region in which the conventions are used. Thus, translation contributes to the spreading of socio-geographical ideas and information.

A productive, competent, and adequate translation of road traffic terms and conventions requires highly qualified practitioners. A correct, scientifically based solution to terminological problems in translation requires the continuous study of specialized vocabulary, based on the recognition of its naturalness, regularity, and precision in the system of a national language(s). In the framework of specialized vocabulary, the study of terminology issues should be carried out by both linguists/terminologists and the representatives of the relevant field (experienced drivers, officials). Driving is a matter of life and death, and misinterpreting road traffic information can lead to tragic and catastrophic consequences. Paraphrasing the well-known quote, "Never drive faster than your guardian angel can fly," for the purpose of our research we may state, "Never translate faster than your knowledge in the specialized field, practical skills, and experience in translation can permit".

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