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Terminological standardization in the social sciences and humanities – the case of Croatian anthropological terminology

The paper presents the construction of anthropological terminology in the Croatian language. It focuses, on one hand, on some specific challenges that Croatian, as a “non-dominant language”, is facing in the process of developing and standardizing its scientific terminology. These challenges arise as a result of the small size of the Croatian scientific community and its limited influence on the development of particular disciplines, which means that concepts are frequently adopted from work by scholars writing in dominant languages, such as English. On the other hand, the paper addresses issues that necessarily arise when strict terminological standardization principles and ideals are applied to anthropology, as an interdisciplinary humanistic discipline using a wide array of often ambiguous terms which are difficult to fit into the rigorously organized conceptual system stipulated by traditional terminology.

Key words: terminology; anthropology; standardization; humanities; social sciences; STRUNA; ANTRONA.

1. Introduction

Like other non-dominant languages, Croatian is continuously swamped with large numbers of new English terms from all fields of knowledge. The need for systematic construction of Croatian terminology in the different scientific disciplines has prompted the start of the “Croatian Scientific Terminology” project (*Hrvatsko*



strukovno nazivlje or STRUNA for short). This paper is based on the authors' experience of working on one of the STRUNA subprojects, "Basic Anthropological Terminology".¹ We will start with a consideration of the various benefits of terminology building for non-dominant languages such as Croatian.² We will then present the main principles of the Vienna school of terminology in its classical variant, which the STRUNA database is generally modelled on, with an emphasis on the critique of the onomasiological approach from the Foucauldian perspective of discourse as something that creates reality, instead of reflecting it. The central section of the paper will focus on some of the most important issues (supported by concrete examples) which arise when trying to consistently apply these principles and which are perhaps most starkly evident in the creation of terminology in the social sciences and humanities (SSH). (In this paper we will not engage more extensively with terminological theory, but the reader is advised to consult the paper by our colleagues Orlić & Šimičić (2013), who also participated in the construction of the database, for a more theory-driven consideration of some of the issues presented here). We will additionally emphasize and support with examples the issue of severing concepts from their theoretical context, as well as their broader sociocultural context. All of these issues will lead us to conclude that the strict rules of traditional terminology are not appropriate tools for dealing with terms in SSH and can only be accepted as a partial compromise, while other strategies and models will have to be resorted to in order to fully express the complexity and dynamics of these fields in a systematic manner.

¹ The central part of the project, funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (07.01./22 HRZZ), was concluded in 2012, however the database is constantly being updated and revised. A printed version of the database of the STRUNA anthropology subproject, along with three papers by project participants dealing with the importance and challenges of creating and translating terminology, particularly in SSH, was published as Sujoldžić (2013a). For a more detailed account of the steps in the actual work process of creating the anthropology database, see the paper by Lah, Iveković Martinis, & Jernej Pulić in the same volume (2013), as well as Lah, Orlić, Šimičić, Iveković Martinis, & Sujoldžić (2013). Members of the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, who provide linguistic and terminographic verification of the terminological work in STRUNA, have also published extensively on the project and some of the challenges it has faced in creating a Croatian national term base (Bratanić, Brač & Pritchard 2015; Nahod & Vukša Nahod 2014; Bratanić & Ostroški Anić 2013; Bratanić & Brač 2013; Brač & Lončar 2012, and others).

² The problem of the dominance of English in global academia, specifically with regard to terminology, is addressed more extensively in Sujoldžić (2013b).



2. Terminology construction in “non-dominant languages”

The global academic community has, like many others, more or less accepted English as its *lingua franca* (Bidlake 2008: 3). This means that the everyday professional activities of many scholars (whose first language isn't English) are conducted in at least two languages. Even communication with colleagues within their first-language community is likely to include a large amount of English, since the translation of terminology into the world's many languages necessarily lags somewhat behind its introduction into academic discourse (Bidlake gives the example of publications in the medical sciences in Sweden, *ibid.*: 12). However, although command of a foreign language can certainly not be considered a bad thing, from the global perspective the growing tendency of scholars to write in English instead of their first language has a detrimental effect on both the articulative capacities and the intellectual diversity of scholarly discourse (Heim & Tymowski 2006). The influence of English is, of course, unavoidable and will probably continue to grow, but the systematic creation of terminology in non-dominant languages is a crucial step in stimulating writing in the first language.

From the perspective of the non-dominant language communities themselves, the benefits of terminology building are even more evident. A very important problem is described in UNESCO's *Guidelines for Terminology Policies*:

An ever-increasing body of empirical evidence indicates that there is a critical relationship between individuals' opportunity to use their mother tongue in a full range of cultural, scientific and commercial areas, and the socio-economic well-being of their respective language communities. People whose mother-tongue is not (or not sufficiently) developed from the point of view of terminology and special purpose languages ... tend to be disadvantaged" (UNESCO 2005: v).

Especially smaller language communities (including linguistic minorities of all sorts) have to make more efforts than the surrounding larger language communities in order to prevent marginalization with respect to scientific-technical and economic-industrial development - a factor that ultimately may lead to socio-economic decline. ... Similarly, a language that lags behind in its terminology for a given domain risks losing the ability to communicate in that subject in its language over time" (UNESCO 2005: vi).

Non-dominant languages like Croatian necessarily have a marginal role in the global multilingual academic community. However, the systematic creation of terminology is an important tool for the self-assertion of non-dominant languages, which, apart from facilitating and improving professional communication in small



language communities, serves to assert the communities' right to use their own language in all spheres of life.

We end this section with a few thoughts and observations. If the terminology of an academic discipline in a non-dominant language community is heavily populated with foreign-language terms, this, in our opinion, continuously foregrounds the fact that the largest part of the theoretical and research input is coming from outside of the community. This is, of course, inevitably the case and is not bad in itself, but it could contribute to creating a feeling of dependence among scholars in the small language community. When terms are translated into the local language, they have a much better chance of smoothly entering academic discourse, which means that it won't take as long for the concepts they refer to and the perspectives that these concepts embody to become familiar to the community. We find that this way the foreignness of the terms and concepts is moderated to some extent and they are closer to becoming "our own". This appropriation can very productively add new layers of meaning or a slightly different viewpoint to the concepts introduced, thus contributing to the diversity and dynamic nature of academic research (Bidlake 2008: 12) in SSH. Terminology creation can also aid the diffusion of research results outside of the academic world, as foreign terms can carry the somewhat odious connotation of jargon and be more difficult for laypersons to familiarize themselves with.

3. Traditional terminology and its application

According to the STRUNA website, "STRUNA is a database for the systematic collection, creation and interpretation of Croatian scientific terminology, with the goal of its standardization. It is presently the only active form of terminology planning in Croatia" (<http://struna.ihjj.hr/page/o-struni>). STRUNA uses an adapted version of traditional terminographic description, based primarily on the principles elaborated in the ISO Standards (TC 37), which are in turn based on traditional terminological theory and practice, best exemplified by the Vienna school of terminology in its classical variant (Hudeček & Mihaljević 2009). In the last two or three decades, strong critique has been directed at this tradition from the perspective of cognitive science and research of language practices. Rita Temmerman's *Towards new ways of terminology description* (2000) is a good example of such a critique and it includes a review of a number of other critical approaches to traditional terminology. The main source of the problems that these critiques describe is the focus on standardization, characteristic of the classical schools of terminology. As a result of this focus, traditional terminology aims at constructing idealized termino-



logical systems which conform to strict rules, without acknowledging the fact that actual communicative practice in special languages is quite far from this ideal and that there are good reasons for this.

Temmerman lists five basic principles of the classical Vienna school of terminology: the primary focus on concepts instead of terms, the univocity principle (elimination of polysemy and synonymy), the idea that concepts are clear-cut and can be attributed a single, precisely defined and firmly held place in a concept system, the idea that concepts should preferably be defined in a traditional intensional definition, and a synchronic approach to the study and construction of terminological systems (Temmerman 2000: 4). These principles are all interdependent, since a precisely defined, stable and coherent conceptual system determines, on one hand, both the exact place of any particular concept in the system as well as its definition and, on the other hand, it requires clear-cut concepts, univocal term-concept relations and a synchronic approach which ignores changes through time. The first principle, the onomasiological approach, can therefore be considered the crucial tenet of the Vienna school, since it is the foundation on which rest the remaining four main principles.

The onomasiological perspective fails to acknowledge the role of language in the conceptualization of reality (Temmerman 2000: 6). Although ISO Standard no. 704, *Terminology work – Principles and methods*, states that “in the course of producing a *terminology*, philosophical discussions on whether an object actually exists in reality are unproductive and should be avoided” and that instead “attention should be focused on how one deals with *objects* for the purposes of communication“, it still approaches the relation between objects, concepts and language from an objectivist perspective:

... through observation and a process of abstraction called conceptualization, *objects* are categorized into classes, which correspond to units of knowledge called *concepts*, which are represented in various forms of communication (*object* → *concept* → communication)... (ISO 704 2009: 2; original italics)

Objects are therefore, at least in principle, taken to exist prior to their conceptualization. Only after the relation between the object and the concept has been established, does the third element of the triangle of reference, the signifier, enter the picture. This approach clearly posits the realm of concepts as independent of the realm of language (Temmerman 2000: 5), which is relegated to a position of secondary importance. This order of object → concept → signifier is precisely the opposite of the way the production of meaning is understood in poststructuralist theory since at least the 1960's, perhaps most notably in the works of Michel Foucault



(for example, see Foucault 1982). It is by now a truism, at least in the humanities, that the formation of concepts and conceptual schemes takes place within the realm of language, or, on a more specific level, of discourse, and therefore cannot be considered in isolation. Foucault has shown how even discourses aspiring to utmost objectivity, such as that of medical science or natural history, actively construct the concepts that they use, as well as the very “objects” that they purportedly only identify and describe (see sections “The formation of objects” (pp. 40–49) and “The formation of concepts” (pp. 56–63) in Foucault 1982). The creation and elaboration of concepts can therefore be considered the central preoccupation of discourse, including that of the sciences. Objective reality, or the realm of “objects”, is thus never accessible in itself to the human mind, but is necessarily a product of various processes of meaning making.³ Discourse creates reality - this is why, in the appropriate circumstances, it can wield great power. The claim of the Vienna school that terminology starts from concepts, which are in turn formed on the basis of objects, creates an illusion of objectivity, concealing the discursive origin of terminology. Terminology does not describe the world, but creates it, and therefore lacks objectivity. To standardize terminology is to shape the discourse and thereby the very possibilities of thought about “reality” within a certain field. In this light, the limitations that the strict rules of traditional terminology impose on the richness of professional discourse do not seem to have a legitimate basis.

4. Issues in the application of terminological principles

Terminological work in the social sciences and humanities has only relatively recently been started (Cabré 1999: 17), since the idea of terminology originated in the technical sciences. As Orlić & Šimičić (2013) point out, it has been acknowledged that this extension of terminological work to new fields requires a reworking of the traditional terminological framework (Budin 2001; Myking 2001; Cabré Castellví 2003). Anthropology is the first of the social sciences and humanities to have become part of the Croatian STRUNA project and therefore the first sub-project to encounter issues which arise perhaps most prominently in the process of standardizing terminology in SSH and which call into question the appropriateness of the

³ Another critique of objectivism has come from the cognitive sciences, which point not to language or discourse, but “experience and understanding” as the basis of conceptualization (Temmerman 2000: 4).



form of traditional terminology for the systematization of knowledge in these fields.⁴

4.1. *The Univocity Principle*

The classical terminological rules of the Vienna school require that only one concept be designated by a certain term, which means that polysemy is excluded. In the STRUNA database, this is apparent in the fact that multiple entries of the same term with different definitions are strongly discouraged. However, since academic or professional discourse is not a reflection of objective reality, it is impossible to avoid the situation where authors belonging to different schools of thought will offer perhaps radically diverging interpretations of what might otherwise be perceived as the “same” phenomenon.⁵ It is therefore perfectly reasonable for certain terms to have multiple, often mutually exclusive definitions. This is frequently the case with key terms which have a large scope, such as “culture”, “society”, “anthropology” and the like. The option of creating new, separate terms for each of the various definitions of a single term is not feasible, since it would produce immense confusion, not to mention the question of whether even a lexically rich and flexible language such as English would be able to accommodate 160 different terms to replace the common term “culture” (cf. Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952). The only relatively acceptable option when faced with the goal of standardizing terminology is to undertake a form of componential analysis in order to extract the common elements of the different concepts designated by a term and to produce what might be considered a most generalized definition. It is obvious, however, that a terminology produced in this way fails to encompass the theoretical abundance which is an essential aspect of academic research. The most appropriate way of differentiating between the various meanings of a term would be to link the term in a meaningful way to the different theoretical contexts it figures in, but this is not possible in a traditional terminological system.

A somewhat different case is the one where a single term signifies what is understood as entirely different phenomena linked by metonymic relations. For example, “ethnography” is variously taken to refer to a field of research (even a “sci-

⁴ To an extent, of course, other fields apart from SSH also deal with similar issues; however, we believe that SSH are a particularly appropriate field to demonstrate them (see also: Riggs, Mälkiä & Budin 1997).

⁵ Orlić & Šimičić (2013) elaborate on this as well, citing Riggs, Mälkiä and Budin: “In many fields, the concepts needed are still imprecise and fluid. Few agreements, or none, can be reached on the concepts themselves or on the terms used to designate them.” (Riggs, Mälkiä & Budin 1997: 186).



ence”, in some sources!), the activity of conducting research, the result of this activity (generally considered to be a written text) or a set of methods used when conducting this activity. In addition to this, the term “ethnography” (in the sense of “activity” or “set of methods”) is often used as a synonym of “field work” and “participant observation”, although in other cases it is considered a hyponym of “field work” and a hypernym of “participant observation”. This complex instance of polysemy combined with synonymy is frequently explicitly acknowledged and seems to cause no significant misunderstandings among experts or even between experts and the non-academic public. It does however cause trouble when trying to univocally define ethnography within a terminological system. This goes to show that polysemy is not necessarily the hindrance to meaningful scientific communication that traditional terminology considers it to be. On the contrary, the precision and univocity required by the traditional terminological approach seem, in cases such as this, to be unnecessary hair-splitting. All of the aforementioned aspects of ethnography are interdependent and it is usually not necessary to distinguish strictly between them, so any, or several, of them can be used to construct a definition. Here are a few definitions of ethnography:

Ethnography is that field of anthropological research based on direct observation of and reporting on a people’s way of life. It is the basic methodology employed by cultural anthropologists and consists of two stages: fieldwork, which is the term used for the process of observing and recording data; and reportage, the production of a written description and analysis of the subject under study. (Ashcroft et al. 2001: 85)

A science which studies and describes the material and non-material culture of particular peoples (Šonje 2000: 252; our translation).

Ethnography, the study of people in a natural setting, provides an opportunity for researchers to conduct a detailed study of a group of people while being immersed in the culture of that group. Ethnography (*ethno*, ‘people’ or ‘folk,’ and *graphy*, ‘to describe something’), sometimes referred to as participant observation or field research, involves the study of people or an organization through face-to-face interactions in a real-life social setting. (Birx 2006: 853; original emphasis)

Ethnographic fieldwork is an in-depth localized research process aimed at the description and analysis of cultural systems. (Birx 2006: 968)

Ethnography is the primary, data-gathering phase of sociocultural anthropology, that is, field work in a given society. (Kottak 1975: 5)



The systematic description of a particular culture based on firsthand observation. (Haviland 1999: 14)

Ethnography is the written description and analysis of the culture of a group of people based on fieldwork. (Nanda and Warms 2007: 60)

The word 'ethnography' has a double meaning in anthropology: ethnography as *product* (ethnographic writings – the articles and books written by anthropologists), and ethnography as *process* (participant observation or fieldwork). (Barnard 2010: 243; original emphasis)

The written description of different peoples and their customs (literally, "nation-writing," from the Greek): including articles, fieldnotes, monographs, and websites. The term covers both the object produced ("she has written an ethnography of the Arawak people") and the processes and methods of producing it ("what is the future of ethnography?"). (Morris 2012: 85)

Another key traditional terminological principle is that only one term can designate a particular concept, which excludes synonymy. According to the official STRUNA website, "the goal of terminological description is the standardization of terms, which means that the purpose of selecting and entering a term into the database is to recommend the use of the most acceptable term for a particular concept. Other existing terms for the concept are also listed, but each of them is assigned a certain normative status: admitted term, not recommended term, obsolete term, slang term" (our translation). However, what might appear as synonymy could actually be a case of different theoretical approaches to the "same" phenomenon, which have resulted in the creation of different terms, precluding the problem described above, but creating a different one. Terms are necessarily embedded in their theoretical context, from which they obtain their meaning. When they are removed from this context and defined separately, with only a brief and superficial reference to it or perhaps none at all, it can be difficult to specify the often subtle differences in conceptual emphasis between them.

A good example would be the terms "appropriation", "catachresis" and "mimicry". "Appropriation" is perhaps the least specific and most widely used of the three and might be defined as "the ways in which postcolonial societies take over aspects of the imperial culture in order to resist its domination and to articulate their own social and cultural identity". The emphasis here is on taking over something that was originally associated with another entity and making it one's own. The term "catachresis" was taken from linguistics by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990). It has the same basic meaning of "appropriation", but with an emphasis on something being used in a different ("wrong") way or being given a



different meaning than it previously had in its original context. The concept of “mimicry” was introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994), another postcolonial theorist, and it conceptualizes appropriation as imitation (mimicking) of the colonizers by the colonized, which introduces the potential for parody contained in imitative practices. Subtle nuances in emphasis and connotation such as these play an important role in the discourse of the humanities. Traditional terminology, however, is not designed so as to be receptive to this level of meaning. It would take much more space than an entry in the STRUNA database allows, to explain the place of these three terms in their respective theoretical contexts and the import of these contexts on their specific meanings.

4.2. Construction of a conceptual system and intensional definition

Apart from the exclusion of polysemy and synonymy, another big issue for terminology in SSH is the requirement of constructing a coherent conceptual system. Preferably, all concepts in the STRUNA database should be arranged according to unambiguous relations of superordination and subordination, so that they form a clear hierarchical system, with groups of concepts on a lower taxonomical level branching out from their common superordinated concepts. This systematic approach goes hand in hand with the synchronicity principle adhered to by the classical Vienna school approach. All concepts belonging to a terminology are regarded as constituting a single synchronous system, while any changes in terms or concepts or their relations through time are disregarded. The consistent application of these principles in SSH is all but impossible and in many cases would not even make sense.

The relations of hypernymy and hyponymy between terms are supposed to be direct, which means logical or ontological relations (Temmerman 2000: 7). Clear hierarchical relations like these can be established only in relatively rare and isolated cases in sociocultural anthropology, such as when classifying interviews as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, deep interviews, person-centered interviews etc. or dividing anthropology into its classical “four fields”: sociocultural anthropology, physical anthropology, linguistic anthropology and archaeological anthropology. But the great majority of terms simply cannot be subsumed under any relevant hypernym (relevant in the sense that it could also legitimately be entered as a term into the database), nor can any specific hyponyms or antonyms be determined. This is a consequence of the fact that the “objects” of study in SSH are mostly not of a material nature and are thus more difficult or even impossible to organize into detailed taxonomies. This makes it significantly more demanding to



determine which information should be included in the definition of a particular concept. A traditional terminological definition would ideally follow the classical formula: *genus proximum et differentia specifica*. This means that it should start with the nearest superordinated term, in order to situate the concept being defined on the appropriate taxonomical level, which should then be followed by a list of the minimal number of characteristics necessary to differentiate the concept from all of its cohyponyms. If no relevant hypernyms or cohyponyms of a certain term can be identified, then obviously this formula cannot be applied. The decision on what to include in the definition rests in such cases on personal judgment alone.

Instead of hypernymy, hyponymy and cohyponymy, different, more varied and ambiguous types of relations exist between concepts in SSH. While some concepts have transcended their original theoretical context and are now used by authors from various schools of thought and some concepts never were associated with any specific author or theory, many of them still primarily derive their legitimacy from the theoretical framework they are embedded in, i.e. from the relations they sustain with other concepts within the same framework. The nature of these relations is usually highly complex and specific and cannot be generalized. Take for example Victor Turner's concepts "structure", "anti-structure", "liminality" and "communitas". None of these concepts make sense when considered separately from the others. This is because the observation of various similar "objects" from which certain common characteristics are then abstracted does not, as traditional terminology would have it, suffice to explain the formation of these concepts. The concepts do not come to be before the theoretical framework they are a part of nor does the framework precede the concepts; they are one and the same. However, while "structure" and "anti-structure" can be defined as antonyms and thus explicitly placed in some kind of relation in a terminological database, the remaining two concepts cannot be linked to them, since the relations between them are not of the straightforward logical or ontological (partitive, successive, material-product) kind. The STRUNA database does offer the option of entering additional information necessary for the comprehension of the concept in a separate field labelled *Note*, but then the question arises of the point of separating the definition from the note, when both are equally relevant in explaining the meaning of the concept.

As we have already mentioned, differences in theoretical frameworks also frequently account for polysemy. The term "social structure" has been variously used by several authors to refer to different aspects of society on different levels of abstraction. Barnard (2010: 645–646) provides a review of the most prominent usages of the term and the ways authors have related it to other key terms:



The terms ‘social structure’ and ‘social organization’ have long had slightly different implications, although the distinction between them has not always been as clear-cut as some commentators would have preferred. ‘Social organization’ has tended to be used loosely to refer to the sum total of activities performed in a given social context. ‘Social structure’ has usually been employed for the social context itself, or more precisely for the set of social relations which link individuals in a society. Yet the definition of ‘social structure’ varies according to the theoretical perspective of the writer and the degree of precision required by his or her perspective.

...

For Radcliffe-Brown, ‘social structure’ includes the relations between individual people – he uses the example of a hypothetical Tom, Dick and Harry. Structural form, in contrast, is at a higher level of abstraction – the positions Tom, Dick or Harry occupy in relation to one another.

...

Lévi-Strauss, and many other anthropologists, have consistently employed the term ‘social structure’ for what Radcliffe-Brown called ‘structural form’. Lévi-Strauss even uses ‘social structure’ to refer to a still higher degree of abstraction – the structure of social relations in all societies, as well as that within a particular society (Radcliffe Brown’s ‘structural form’).

...

Parsons’s view of the relation between social organization and social structure (e.g. 1951) was essentially the same as that of Radcliffe-Brown, but in addition he posited the idea of the *social system*, which comprises both.

...

Many anthropologists since have happily employed ‘social structure’ and ‘social organization’ synonymously, to refer to either of the concepts Radcliffe-Brown distinguished, or to both, as in Parsons’s formulation.

Of course, given the complexity of the concepts and theories in question, this is necessarily an over-simplified representation only meant to give a very rough idea of the different positions concepts referred to by a single term can occupy in different theoretical frameworks. Although only Lévi-Strauss’s use of the term “social structure” visibly stands out from the others presented here, each theoretical perspective relates the concept designated by this term to a different set of other concepts, which necessarily influences the way each concept is understood. When relating social structure to social organization (as in the “general use” of these terms), social structure is the more abstract of the two, while when it is related to structural form (Radcliffe-Brown) the opposite is the case. The quote from Barnard clearly



shows how much explanation is needed in order to clarify the differences between various understandings of such a crucial and frequently used anthropological term. The concise and limited format of definitions in the STRUNA database inevitably makes it impossible to include all this information, rendering the resulting “unambiguous” definition hardly meaningful to experts (since they know more than it says) or students, laypersons and translators alike (since it glosses over the theoretical complexity behind the different uses of the term).

4.3. *Synchronic perspective*

The synchronic perspective of the classical Vienna school is also an issue, since concepts in SSH are subjected to a permanent process of re-evaluation and re-configuration and can never be fixed. This is particularly obvious in the case of obsolete and ideologically problematic concepts, such as “race”, “primitive”, “the East” and the like. Such concepts cannot be excluded from a terminological effort, since, even though they might be considered by contemporary scholars to be embodiments of unacceptable ideologies, these ideologies and the concepts associated with them are still at large outside the academic community and as such still demand critical reflection. Even in the case of concepts not viewed as particularly problematic, but merely outdated, this is not reason enough to discard them. As a result of the already mentioned difficulty of empirically proving or refuting theories in SSH, concepts in these fields do not become outdated in quite the same way as in the natural and technical sciences. It is always possible for “forgotten” ideas to be re-discovered and endowed with new significance after an appropriate paradigm shift takes place, as was for example the case with the theoretical concepts of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin – such as dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia – which were applied in the poststructuralist context to a broader scope of cultural phenomena (cf. Bhabha 1994).

4.4. *Theoretical context*

Like other discourses, texts in SSH communicate by constructing concepts. These concepts are the essential elements of theoretical frameworks, which act as tools in the construction of different representations of what is understood as social, cultural, political etc. reality. Concepts, as well as the terms which refer to them, form an inextricable part of these theoretical frameworks and consequently change or lose



their meaning when considered on their own.⁶ The problem with defining concepts separately from their theoretical context is related to the idea of a terminology as a single coherent system. Terminology in SSH simply does not and cannot constitute a single system. Since theories in these fields are generally difficult to empirically prove or refute with a greater degree of certainty, radically different conceptual frameworks necessarily co-exist and, while some of them have certain elements and aspects in common, many are mutually exclusive or incompatible. This means that concepts are not universally shared, quite the contrary, they are frequently the subject of prolonged and heated debate. To enter terms into a database alongside each other without clarifying their different contexts creates the false impression that their legitimacy can be derived from a common theoretical basis. It also means that concepts are presented as if they were generally accepted in the whole field, while their heuristic value might actually be recognized only among adherents to a particular theoretical approach. (Again, the *Note* field allows for some adjustment in this regard.)

For example, the term “hydraulic civilization” was coined by Karl August Wittfogel in his book *Oriental Despotism* (1957), as part of his theory on the development of early civilizations. According to this theory, the appearance of civilizations such as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Peru etc. was based on constructing an irrigation system, which was controlled by a ruling elite and which required a centralized government and a highly complex social structure. Wittfogel called the political organization of such civilizations “Oriental despotism”, even though hydraulic civilizations are not geographically restricted to Asia, because he considered it a characteristic of Asian societies (most likely under the influence of Marx’s notion of the “Asiatic mode of production”), contrasting this type of political organization to Western societies. However, his theory was subsequently heavily criticized and the crucial role of irrigation in the formation of early civilizations has been called into question due to a lack of evidence. As a result, the terms “hydraulic civilization” and “Oriental despotism” are almost exclusively used by adherents of Wittfogel’s theory.

⁶ For a more extensive consideration of the importance of theoretical, sociocultural and communicative context in terminology creation and translation, also based on the experience of working on the STRUNA project, see Orlić & Šimičić (2013).



4.5. *Sociocultural context*

The final set of issues that we will mention here is not directly related to the format of terminology, but is particularly familiar to practitioners of cultural anthropology, since it has to do with the translation of cultural difference. Apart from their embeddedness in a particular theoretical framework, concepts in SSH maintain strong links with the broader social and cultural context. Since human societies and cultures vary to a great extent both in space and time, as well as being internally heterogeneous, it is clear that concepts cannot unproblematically be transferred to a different context without running the risk of causing misunderstandings. A universal set of concepts used to describe, analyse and interpret all of the world's cultures of course is not possible. On the other hand, if any academic thought is to be encouraged which rises to a higher analytical level than that of individual societies, cultures, social groups etc., a certain number of sufficiently generalized and generalizable concepts must be available. However, their use in any given context remains a matter demanding an acute critical awareness.

When constructing terminology in a non-dominant and – globally speaking – marginal language such as Croatian, a large portion of the work will necessarily consist in translating terms and definitions from one of the global languages, most often English. This is the language of some of the world's most economically powerful and culturally influential countries, who also hold sway in the academic world. The mistake to look out for in this case is not the one that anthropologists are usually warned of before going into the field: the mistake of imposing one's own concepts on a foreign culture. In this case, the scholar creating an anthropological terminology in Croatian must instead be wary of inadvertently accepting and introducing into their language and culture a foreign conceptual scheme which, extracted from its original sociocultural context, significantly changes its meaning.

A good example of this is a term often associated with anthropology: 'tribe'. Initially, it signified a group of people smaller than a nation⁷ and consisting of a number of yet smaller groups (usually called 'clans'), connected by ties of kinship, a common culture and other common characteristics. However, the specific present-day political position of Native Americans has added new layers to this meaning. Native American tribes are now considered political units, a designation on the basis of which their members are entitled to certain rights inaccessible to others. There is no ethnic group in a comparable political position in Croatia. It is interest-

⁷ However, this distinction is also changing, as some Native American tribes prefer instead the term "nation", for example the Cherokee Nation.



ing to note, however, that the word for ‘tribe’ in the Southern Slavic languages – ‘pleme’ – is traditionally used in some parts of the Balkans to refer also to groups tied by kinship (something like a very broad and inclusive definition of a family). Such a concept is only possible in cultures where blood ties are of great importance in all aspects of social life. However, the sociopolitical position of this type of ‘tribe’ is completely different from the one of Native Americans in the USA or Canada. The ethnic group they belong to is generally the bearer of the dominant culture in their countries, so their cultural and political ‘rights’ are not an issue at all (since the concept of ‘rights’ makes sense only when they are endangered). How the concept of ‘tribe’ is understood in an anthropological text will therefore be shaped by relevant aspects of one or the other sociocultural context, perhaps without explicitly clarifying them, which is a possible cause for misunderstanding or limited understanding of the text on the part of a less informed reader. Although one of the goals of our project was to help prevent such misunderstandings, it is clear that this would ideally require much more room for explanation than is offered by the format of the STRUNA database.

4.6. *Translation issues*

Cultural translation is of course closely linked to linguistic translation. The prevalence of English as the source of new terms and concepts is even stronger in the natural sciences than in SSH. Scholars in Croatia often find it easier and more efficient to write their papers in English, because it allows them to communicate with a much larger audience. Moreover, even when they write in Croatian, they often use English terminology. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, English terminology is perceived not only as the most frequently used, but also as the “original” terminology, which makes the use of English a matter of both convenience and precision. Secondly, terminology is much more abundant and elaborate in English than in Croatian, which often makes using Croatian terminology arduous. The success of terminology depends on its being accepted and used in academic discourse. If scholars have at their disposal a relatively stable set of terms whose use has been amply attested in existing discourse, they will naturally rely on it to facilitate their professional communication and avoid potential misunderstanding. As a result, scholars in Croatia are faced with the difficult task of creating (usable) Croatian terminologies, while at the same time remaining true to their professional principles.

Translation of terminology is necessarily seen as something that potentially jeopardizes the transparency of meaning, i.e. new Croatian terms can obscure con-



nections with the original terms. For example, one of the models of population structure is called the “stepping-stone model”, which biological anthropologists in Croatia have so far preferred to refer to in English. Obviously, the term is metaphorical, drawing on an analogy between the way genes spread from population to population and the way a person jumps from stone to stone when crossing a stream. More or less literal translations (such as *model preskakivanja kamena*) have been suggested, but the overall opinion of experts in the field, shared by linguists from the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, seems to be that, despite the English original, there is no need to employ a metaphor in the Croatian term. According to this opinion, a more transparent and straightforward formulation should be resorted to, which would not, in fact, involve translating the linguistic expression – especially because there is no readily available equivalent of “stepping stone” in Croatian – but would provide a clearer connection with the concept.

From the onomasiological perspective of traditional terminology, this would be the preferred approach, but, on the other hand, it would obscure the connection with the original English term. From the point of view of traditional terminology, even the original term should be replaced by a less figurative one, in order to ensure unambiguous communication. However, it is not the metaphor that is the problem, since metaphorization can in fact facilitate, rather than impede understanding (Temmerman 2000: 156). Metaphors also allow a more economical communication of meaning, conveying more meaning in a shorter expression and making the term wieldier. Metaphorization actually appears as a problem only in cases such as this one, when a metaphor used in terminology in one language cannot be adequately translated into another, since metaphors are generally language-specific. In an ideal case, both the English and the Croatian term would be metaphorical, but even if metaphorization were applied, the resulting metaphor might be too opaque and difficult to relate to the English term, because of language specificity. All of this goes to show that even in biological anthropology, which should be the perfect field of anthropology for the application of rigorous terminological principles, especially those that require the separation of concepts from any particular language, linguistic and cultural specificity play a significant role.

5. Conclusion

Although the benefits of and the need for the systematic construction of terminology in non-dominant languages are abundantly clear, the format of traditional terminology, such as that of the classical Vienna school, has proved inappropriate for this task, due to its inability to contain the complexities, ambiguities and dynamic



nature of term and concept systems, which is particularly evident in the social sciences and humanities. Two characteristics of concepts are particularly relevant. One is the fact that they are not merely the results of an inductively founded act of abstraction and therefore are not based on the observable characteristics of objects, but are specific constructions of those objects. The second is the fact that these constructions constitute inextricable parts of theoretical frameworks, in which concepts derive their meaning and significance from their relations with other concepts.

These characteristics clash with the focus on standardization of the classical Vienna school of terminology, whose rules are difficult or impossible to apply without resorting to a compromise. The exclusion of polysemy produces very generalized definitions of concepts which are actually understood in numerous, perhaps radically different ways from different theoretical positions. The exclusion of synonymy makes it difficult to describe concepts differentiated only by subtle nuances of emphasis and connotation. The requirement of constructing a clear conceptual system based only on unambiguous logical relations of hypernymy, hyponymy, cohyponymy and antonymy is unattainable when dealing with concepts which establish very different types of relations with each other. The plurality of conceptual systems associated with different theoretical positions, as well as different historical periods in SSH, render the idea of a universal and coherent terminological system meaningless and impossible.

It is therefore necessary to turn to different models, systems or strategies in order to be able to represent the complex conceptual universe of the social sciences and humanities (although the same could legitimately be said of other fields). As Foucault has shown, discourse is that which creates reality and it does so through the creation and elaboration of concepts and their relations. It follows from this that the creation of concepts is the basic activity of scholarship and its highly complex, layered and dynamic nature exceeds by far the capacities of traditional terminology. A possible alternative to consider might be a combination of terminological principles with the more inclusive and flexible format of the encyclopedia. A resource which certainly should not be ignored, however, are the digital media, which enable great freedom and flexibility and offer a vast range of options for conceiving, designing and operationalizing a platform for knowledge systematization in ways which would not limit, but open up creative possibilities for knowledge production.



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TERMINOLOŠKA STANDARDIZACIJA U DRUŠTVENIM I HUMANISTIČKIM ZNANOSTIMA – SLUČAJ HRVATSKOGA ANTROPOLOŠKOG NAZIVLJA

Rad se bavi izgradnjom antropološkoga nazivlja u hrvatskome jeziku. S jedne se strane fokusira na specifične izazove s kojim se hrvatski, kao „nedominantan jezik“, suočava u procesu razvoja i standardizacije svojega znanstvenog nazivlja. Ovi se izazovi pojavljuju kao posljedica činjenice da je hrvatska znanstvena zajednica mala i da je njezin utjecaj na razvoj pojedinih disciplina ograničen, što znači da se koncepti često preuzimaju iz radova znanstvenika koji pišu dominantnim jezicima, poput engleskoga. S druge strane, rad se ba-



vi problemima koji se nužno pojavljuju kada se strogi principi i ideali terminološke standardizacije primjenjuju na antropologiju, kao interdisciplinarnu humanističku disciplinu koja upotrebljava širok raspon često dvosmislenih termina koje je teško uklopiti u rigorozno organiziran konceptualni sustav kakav pretpostavlja tradicionalna terminologija.

Ključne riječi: terminologija; antropologija; standardizacija; humanističke znanosti; društvene znanosti; STRUNA; ANTRONA.