STANDARDIZATION OF E-COMMERCE TERMINOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The importance of e-business and e-commerce grows rapidly in all fields of human life, including not only marketing and trade, but also entertainment and hobbies, as well as education (e-learning) and research. This implies that it becomes more and more important to know the proper usage of e-business services and as a part of that English e-commerce terminology [1].

The growing use of English in international business seems to be removing the impact and importance of language differences. This phenomenon has been associated with the growing use of Internet, which resulted in abundance of new e-commerce terms and phrases. However, there are a lot of unsolved linguistic issues relating to e-commerce terminology standardization. The point is in introduction of standardized e-commerce terms for the purpose of improving international understanding. Realizing that correct transfer of information is an imperative in conducting e-commerce business transactions, terminologists and users become more and more aware that language has considerable effects on knowledge and networks and consequently on the process of internationalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of e-business and e-commerce grows rapidly in all fields of human life, including not only marketing and trade, but also entertainment and hobbies, as well as education (e-learning) and research. This implies that it becomes more and more important to know the proper usage of e-business services and as a part of that English e-commerce terminology [1].

Current estimates of language occurrence indicate that approximately 70-80 % of existing Web pages are written in English [2]. Companies from English–speaking countries following the English language path of internationalization forego the learning aspects associated with having to cope with the effects of operating in multiple language environments. The dominance of English as an international business language is a further reinforcing factor. On the contrary, firms from minor language groups, have to deal with language difference from the earliest stages of

internationalization. As such, there is an early development of consciousness of, and responsiveness to, language related issues in international operations (document translation, language training, etc).

However, the fact is that there is not yet a standardized glossary or vocabulary of e-commerce and e-business terms in English. This linguistic issue may cause many blunders and pitfalls. In order to avoid all inconsistencies and misunderstandings, it is necessary to introduce terminology standardization as a success factor, which will enable firm integration of inter-organizational information systems and better understanding and collaboration between parties involved.

2. TERMINOLOGY STANDARDS REVIEW

The three key standards organizations internationally recognized worldwide are:

- The International Standards Organization
  (ISO)<http://www.iso.ch>,
- The International Electrotechnical Commission
  (IEC)<http://www.iec.ch>>,
- The International Telecommunication Union
  (ITU)<<<<http://www.itu.cg>>.

These international organizations have found solutions to "what are standards" thanks to years of experience and practice. In essence, standards are normal and usual way of doing something, hence the French term "normes" and "normalisation". The ISO/IEC defines standards as: "Standards are documented agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose"

Standards in the field of terminologies that are compiled according to termino-graphical methods and presented as dictionaries, databases, vocabularies, glossaries etc, contribute to harmonization of those methods in order to achieve consistent and high quality terminology compilations.

The International Standards Organization Technical Committee 37 governs the most relevant standards in professional terminology and translation.

Some relevant terminology standards that set out the principles of concept-oriented terminology are:

- ISO 704:2000 Terminology work –Principles and methods
- ISO 860:1996 Terminology work-Harmonization of concepts and terms
- ISO 1087-1:2000 Terminology work- Vocabulary- Part2: Computer applications
- ISO 10241:1992 Preparation and layout of international terminology standards
- ISO 12200:1999 Computer applications in terminology-Machine – readable terminology interchange format (MARTIF)-Negotiated interchange
- ISO 12616:2002 Translation –oriented terminography

- ISO/TR 12618: 1994 Computer aids in terminology-Creation and use of terminological databases and text corpora
- ISO 12620: 1999 Computer applications in terminology-Data categories

The 1990 version of ISO 1087 defined "special language" as "a linguistic subsystem, intended for unambiguous communication in a particular subject field using terminology and other linguistic views". Examples of "special languages" here include the scientific and technical languages. We note here that "unambiguity" is a key requirement in being able to support "interoperability".

Being aware of the dominance of one language, that is to say English language, systematic approach to e-commerce terminology written in English will have to be developed, bringing to light the underlying linguistic nature of terminology as well as socio-terminological aspects.

3. MINIMIZING AMBIGUITY IN SEMATIC INTEROPERABILITY IN E-BUINESS TRANSACTIONS

Since the states of ambiguity and uncertainty are not desired from commercial, legal, consumer and information technology perspectives, issues of unambiguousness apply to all aspects of a business transaction and even more to those that are EDI—based. Consequently it is essential to have unambiguous identification of all the entities that comprise a business transaction (Person, objects, events, processes, scenarios, scenario components, constraints).

In that sense Rule 5 is of considerable importance [11]: "The degree to which ambiguity in electronic business transactions can be minimized is directly related to the ability to realize the opportunities in and potential of Open-edi as well as its widespread adoption and use".

The term "unambiguous" is defined as [11]: **unambiguous**: the level of certainty and explicitness required in the completeness of the semantics of the recorded information interchanged appropriate to the goal of the business transaction".

It is recognized that "ISO English" is the working language of ISO/IEC JTC1 (Joint Technical Committee of ISO and IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission). It is also recognized that although the ISO is officially a multilingual organization (that act in accordance with the provisions of ISO Council Resolution 21/1986), **an ISO document** (e.g., an international standard (IS), Technical Report (TR), etc.), **may be circulated/published in the English language only**.

The primary technical committee i.e. "SC=SubCommittee of the ISO/IEC focusing on generic aspects of standards development in the field of electronic business transactions is ISO/IEC JTC1/SC32/WG1 [SC32=Data Management and Interchange; WG1=Open -EDI]" realized that a key success factor in the widespread adoption and use of standards in support of e-business, (e.g., e-commerce, e-government, e-learning, e-logistics, etc.) was the challenge of ensuring a common understanding on a world wide basis of its standardization work. The essential component of any business transaction (whether conducted on a for-profit or not-for-

profit basis) is that it involves" commitment exchange" among the parties involved. Terms and definitions are an essential part of a standard. Use of any single natural language introduces ambiguity especially for those natural languages whose is not uniform or harmonized globally.

Consequently, SC32/WG1 made the decision that if, whatever reason, any of its standards are developed in one ISO/IEC "official language" only, that at the minimum its terms and definitions are made available in more than one language. This decision also confirms the statement that predominance of English language is inevitable.

4. NEED FOR TERM STANDARDIZATION

As the universal language on the Internet, English has a leading role in the usage of e-commerce, which rapidly developed thanks to development of new technologies. Naturally, along with new technologies comes new terminology, which involves terminologists' adaptation to the new technological environment. Having this fact in mind, it is important to introduce standardized terms so that vagueness in communication and interpretation of knowledge can be avoided.

In this area of rapid and continuous changes even native English speakers may express lack of understanding of the newly created terms due to lack of standardization. One of the examples of this claim is presented in [9]: "Eric Davis, an Information Architect with Resource Marketing, recently reported on a **usability test of shopping cart terminology**. The draft design featured the term "Shopping Sled" since the site (selling winter sports products) had a desire to stand out and avoid standard terminology. Result: "50 % of users did not understand the Sled concept. The other 50% said that they figured out what it meant because it was in the same location as a chart would be. They knew that you had to add to *something*, and the only something that made any kind of sense was the Sled. Lesson: Do not try to be smart and use new terms when we have good words available that users already know". The only conclusion that can be drawn from this illustration is that even native English speakers feel noticeable affection towards standardized terms.

In English dictionaries and E-commerce vocabularies/glossaries somewhat special cause of misinforming may be attributed to use of homonyms, synonyms and acronyms.

In [4], the terms e-commerce transaction, business-to-business e-commerce transaction; business-to-business transaction; B2B transaction are synonyms, because all are defined in the same way as "a segment of e-commerce that promotes the sale of products and services between companies through the Internet, extranets and virtual private networks". All these offered variants for the same concept may cause confusion and this is why the terminology needs to be uniform. In that sense, the same term or definition should be used whenever the same concept is mentioned. In such a way, international understanding may be improved.

Good illustration of homonyms, the same term with different definitions resulting in different meanings is presented in [5]: Noun

Transaction is defined as: "the action or process of buying or selling something: She had been involved in several suspicious transactions

financial/commercial/business transaction The sale of goods is the most common form of commercial transaction.

enter into/engage in a transaction Investors feel the company is entering into too many risky transactions", and also as: "very formal **a discussion between two or more people at the meeting**".

In addition to the above problems, the use of acronyms presents further obstacle to correct transfer of information. "Acronyms are especially inconvenient for nowadays efforts to increase transparency and overcome the artificial boundaries between apparently disconnected disciplines. Decoding of acronym IT has yielded the following meaning: IT -Industrial Technology, IT-Information Technology, IT - Intervalence Transition. The above three cases are quoted from Acronym & Abbreviation Meanings (2003)" [6].

Normally, it is desirable to correct and standardize the terminology when new versions are issued in the normal course of standard development. Also wording should be clear and understandable and definitions are to be consistent, self-supporting and carrying basic information. However, when comparing definition of "banner" in [7], which reads "Advertisement in the form of a graphic image on the Web", with definition of "banner" in [8], which reads "A graphic element, usually horizontal, on a Web page, used to title the page, head a new section, present a company's or advertiser's message, or provide a link to another page.", it can be noticed that there is a different quality of knowledge or even lack of information in the first one. These are only some of the reasons why e-commerce terms are to be standardized.

Having in mind the fact that the ratio of native English speakers will continue to fall as more people outside of the "Anglo Saxon" world (without precise knowledge of foreign language) get connected, it should be pointed out that more concise and clearer language of new e-commerce terminology is to be offered. Having in mind the fact that the terms used in special languages (language of e-commerce also belongs to special languages) provide the building blocks from which original texts and translations are crafted, attention should be fixed to an urgent need for e-commerce terms standardization and harmonization.

5. CONCLUSION

The growing use of English in international business seems to be removing the impact and importance of language differences. This phenomenon has been associated with the growing use of Internet, which resulted in abundance of new e-commerce terms and phrases. However, there are a lot of unsolved linguistic issues relating to e-commerce terminology standardization. The point is in introduction of standardized e-commerce terms for the purpose of improving international understanding. Realizing that correct transfer of information is an

imperative in conducting e-commerce business transactions, terminologists and users become more and more aware that language has considerable effects on knowledge and networks and consequently on the process of internationalization.

The ability to define key terms of this area reduces ambiguity, improves consistency and makes business operations more precise. Standardization and harmonization of e-commerce terminology will enable considerable benefits in conducting business operations like global connectivity, high accessibility, interoperability and interactivity.

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