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Workplace Safety Terminology in South Tyrol: Terminological Challenges in German as Minority Language

1. Introduction

Language policy and planning are important aspects in relation to the rights of minority language communities. They enable statutory language rights to be implemented and thus foster the non-discrimination of minority language speakers (cf. ECRML Art. 7(2)). Minority languages can thrive and be successfully used in government, administration, education, media and all relevant domains of specialised knowledge only if the necessary terminology exists in the given language. This calls for dedicated terminology policies, that is, a “set of principles and strategies used as a basis for developing and regulating terminology for a specific language(s) or domain(s)” (ISO 29383:2020, 3.3). Terminology planning specifically aims at “developing, improving, implementing and disseminating the terminology of a domain or subject” (ISO 29383:2020, 3.1). Terminology work and terminology dissemination may therefore play an important role in supporting the protection and promotion of minority languages.

In this paper, we will focus on some terminological challenges related to the German-speaking minority community in South Tyrol, Northern Italy, based on the example of a subdomain of law, occupational health and safety or workplace safety. We will first discuss the relevant theoretical, historical and political background (Section 2). Then we will illustrate the characteristics of the domain of workplace safety from a terminological point of view (Section 3). Section 4 will

give an overview over the current situation of workplace terminology in South Tyrolean German while Section 5 will address the approaches followed to face existing issues and give a brief outlook on some future work. Section 6 will conclude the paper.

2. Background

In Europe, minority languages enjoy different rights and degrees of protection. The sociolinguistic situation of language minorities is also quite diverse. Edwards (2007:459-460) proposes a classification into 'unique', 'non-unique' and 'local-only' minorities that is relevant also from the point of view of terminology planning. The first term designates minority languages spoken within the borders of a single state, such as Sorbian in Germany or Ladin in Italy. The second term refers to languages that are present in more than one state but have a minority status in all states, such as Basque in Spain and France or Occitan in France and Italy. Legal scholars generally call them 'stateless minorities' as opposed to 'national minorities' (Pan et al. 2018: XV, XXXI). The latter generally reside in border regions and have a kin state beyond the national boundaries where the same language is spoken. This last group is termed 'local-only' minorities by Edwards to highlight their minority status within their state but that, at the same time, their language is a majority language in another – often adjacent – state. Slovene in Hungary and German in South Tyrol belong to this last category, for example, because they are national official languages across the borders in Slovenia and in Austria respectively. From the point of view of terminology planning, local-only minority languages benefit from language development taking place abroad in most specialised knowledge domains (e.g. medicine, technology), unlike unique and non-unique minority languages. However, they cannot avoid terminology development efforts in toto. Due to the system-boundness of legal language, which is tightly linked to its legal system in that it expresses specific national legal conceptualisations and rules (Gambaro, Sacco 2018: 7; Cao 2007: 23-24), local-only minorities will inevitably have to develop their own legal terminology.

South Tyrol was a German-speaking part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War I, when it was annexed to the

Kingdom of Italy. The fascist regime that came to power in 1922 implemented a policy of assimilation and thorough Italianisation of the local German-speaking community. German place names, associations and media were forbidden. Italian became the only language of law-making, administration, court proceedings and education. German-speaking public employees were removed from their positions and replaced with speakers of Italian (cf. Peterlini 2012: 43-45, 52-58). Many Italian-speaking citizens from other regions were encouraged to move to South Tyrol, so that the percentage of German-speakers within the local population sank from almost 90% in 1910 to 62% after World War II (ASTAT 2021: 19). For an entire generation, German was relegated to the private sphere, thus hampering its development in many specialised domains, especially in the legal domain. It was neither used by local administrative authorities nor in court.

After World War II, the region was given a first Statute of Autonomy (Constitutional Law No. 5/1948). German-language schools and media were reinstated. The minority was granted the possibility – not the right – to use German to communicate with local administrative offices. However, since the public administration remained in the hands of largely monolingual Italian speakers, this did not foster the development of a South Tyrolean German legal and administrative language that would express the rules and concepts of the Italian legal system. At the time, the centralised Italian state had repressive tendencies which were countered through intense political confrontation. Some groups also enacted terrorist attacks. Finally, in 1972, a New Statute of Autonomy was passed (Presidential Decree No. 670/1972). Following the provisions of the New Statute, German became a co-official language within South Tyrol. The German-speaking minority obtained the right to use their native language in all domains of public life (Art. 100). From that period on, German-speaking civil servants were hired in proportion to the numerical strength of their language group (Art. 89). Knowledge of Italian and German became a requirement for all public employees, thus ensuring that they could address citizens also in the minority language. The resulting linguistic

regime, which is still in place today, was one of complete institutional bilingualism (cf. Meylaerts 2011: 746).

The developments briefly sketched in this section show that, during the last century, South Tyrolean German has not been used constantly in the legal and administrative domain. However, the new linguistic regime established in the 1970s demanded that the necessary terminology be developed and disseminated. Different approaches have been implemented in the last 50 years to address the development and systematisation of legal and administrative terminology in South Tyrol: first top-down through a Terminology Commission, then bottom-up through a collaborative approach with local stakeholders and terminology users (cf. Chiocchetti 2021: 117-120, 126-130). Even though a lot has been achieved and the minority language is successfully used today by the local government, administration and courts, terminology work cannot be considered concluded. Legal subdomains may be of recent development (e.g. computational law), may undergo substantial reforms or may have never been addressed properly from a terminological point of view, as is the case with workplace safety in South Tyrolean German.

3. Workplace safety

Occupational health and safety or workplace safety “deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards” (WHO 2023). In Italy, it is a subdomain of law that aims at effectively protecting the health of workers and preventing possible work-related risks (Solombrino 2017: 3). The domain is of notable social and political relevance, given the high number of workplace accidents still occurring in Italy (INAIL 2019: 2). The relevant legislation is increasingly focusing on involving employees in workplace safety. They are active participants who contribute to achieving safer and healthier workplaces by taking care of their own and their colleagues’ safety (Natullo 2015: 9).

Workplace safety is a highly interdisciplinary subdomain of law. The types of workplaces and tools used within organisations, the types of work activities and the related risks are extremely varied and all subject to workplace safety regulations. For this reason, we can subdivide Italian workplace safety terminology into three different

groups: a) workplace safety terms proper, b) terms borrowed from other legal subdomains and c) terms originally pertaining to other specialised domains. Terms that unmistakably belong to workplace safety are, for example, *medico competente* (appointed doctor) and *lavoro in quota* (work at height). According to Italian law, work at height is a work activity that exposes the worker to a risk of falling from a height of more than two metres above a stable surface (e.g. from a ladder). It has a very precise legal definition within workplace safety. A further set of terms comes from related legal subdomains like labour law (e.g. *datore di lavoro*, employer), social security law (e.g. *tossicodipendenza*, drug addiction) and administrative law (e.g. *direttore dei lavori*, construction manager). It is possible for terms to acquire a specific, more restricted or more ample meaning within workplace safety. For example, the concept *datore di lavoro* has a more ample definition in workplace safety than in labour or civil law, as it includes not only people who have formally signed an employment contract with an employee but also those who are de facto responsible of an organisation or productive unit and have decisional and financial power. The last set of terms is borrowed from a number of specialised domains like physics (e.g. *rumore*, noise), biology (e.g. *agente mutageno*, mutagenic agent), engineering (e.g. *cantiere mobile*, moving (road) building site), psychology (e.g. *burnout*), etc. The latter terms refer to concepts with a *doppelte Fachsprachlichkeit* (Soffritti 2002: 60), a double domain specialisation, since they are already part of specialised communication in other domains but are adopted and often redefined within a subdomain of law. In this way, they become legal concepts and often acquire a specific meaning within workplace safety. For example, the legal definition of *densità di corrente*, current density, is the amount of charge per unit time that flows through a unit area of a chosen cross section of an electrical conductor “such as the human body or a part of it” (cf. Legislative Decree No. 81/2008, annex XXXVI). The last part of the definition is clearly essential for the protection of worker’s health but not mentioned nor relevant in the original definition of the concept within physics.

A shared, consistent and unambiguous terminology in the domain of workplace safety is important to ensure health, safety and unambi-

guous communication during work activities, as it can ultimately contribute to preventing accidents. It is also necessary for knowledge-transfer during workplace safety training, which is compulsory for all employees in Italy. In South Tyrol, where German is a co-official language at local level, legal and administrative provisions concerning workplace safety as well as training events must be delivered also in the minority language. For this reason, consistent and unambiguous workplace safety terminology needs to be available not only in Italian but also in German.

4. *Current terminological situation in South Tyrol*

In 2018 and 2019, the South Tyrolean provincial administration financed a project¹ to collect workplace terminology in Italian and South Tyrolean German and publish the results in the Information System for Legal Terminology *bistro* (<http://bistro.eurac.edu>). The project produced over 1,600 entries with more than 2,400 designations in Italian and more than 2,500 in South Tyrolean German, together with definitions and contexts of use for most concepts. Terminology work has shown that a lot of terms exist and are currently used in South Tyrol to draft local legislation, to share information texts and to hold training events. However, there is notable terminological variation, in particular denominative variation (Freixa 2022: 401). Too many concurring terms for the same concept often lead to inconsistencies and doubts as to whether all terms actually designate the same concept. Existing terminology is also scarcely disseminated. When designations in the minority language are not widely known, text drafters often use the designation in the majority language or create their own translations. In this way, they add further denominative variation and confuse readers. Finally, some denominative gaps had to be addressed, that is, Italian legal concepts for which no South Tyrolean German designation could be retrieved. In the following subsections we will give examples for a) excessive denominative variation, b) insufficient dissemination of South Tyrolean German terms and c) denominative gaps in the domain of workplace safety (cf. Chiocchetti, Stanizzi 2021: 75–78).

¹ SSL-Term, financed by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Bozen, Decree No. 13238/2018, contract No. 037808, CIG ZC723FF490.

4.1 Excessive denominative variation

Denominative variation refers to the phenomenon of one and the same concept having different lexicalised designations, that is, designations with a minimum of stability and consensus among the community of speakers in a specialised domain (Freixa 2006: 51). It may have many causes and often serves domain experts' stylistic, discursive and communicative needs (cf. Freixa 2022: 405–408). However, an excessively inconsistent use of terminology in a minority language reduces the comprehensibility of texts and thus puts the readers in a situation of disadvantage with respect to readers of texts in a majority language. This happens for example when speakers of a minority language end up having to refer to texts in the majority language because the version in their language is not as clear and understandable. Excessive variation may also cause misunderstandings and additional costs, for example when citizens contact public administration offices to ask for clarifications.

An example from South Tyrol is given in Table 1. For one Italian designation and one Italian abbreviation there are at least four different designations and two abbreviations used in South Tyrolean German.

<i>Italian designations</i>	<i>South Tyrolean German designations</i>
Rappresentante dei lavoratori per la sicurezza	Sicherheitssprecher
	Arbeitnehmersvertreter für Sicherheit
	Arbeitnehmersvertreter für Arbeitssicherheit
	Arbeitnehmersvertreter für Arbeitsschutz
RLS	RLS
	AVAS

Table 1: Example of denominative variation in South Tyrolean German with respect to Italian

A rappresentante dei lavoratori per la sicurezza (health and safety representative, literally ‘workers’ representative for safety’) is an important role within the workplace safety system of organisations in Italy. Health and safety representatives are elected by the employees or designated by trade unions and represent staff in matters concerning workplace safety. The full Italian designation is often reduced to the initialism *RLS*. The official German translation of the Italian consolidated law on workplace safety (Legislative Decree No. 81/2008) consistently uses *Sicherheitssprecher* (literally ‘safety spokesperson’). This is a simple and transparent German designation but not a literal translation of the Italian term. However, other South Tyrolean texts published by municipalities, trade associations and even the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work INAIL contain more literal translations of the Italian designation: *Arbeitnehmervertreter für Sicherheit* (e.g. LVH 2023), *Arbeitnehmervertreter für Arbeitssicherheit* (e.g. Gemeinde Bozen 2006: 68; INAIL 2018) and *Arbeitnehmervertreter für Arbeitsschutz* (e.g. HDS 2023). In addition, two short forms can also be found in German language texts, the Italian initialism *RLS* and the German acronym *AVAS*. All these designations are used, for example, to promote training events for staff appointed as health and safety representatives. This makes it sometimes challenging for minority language speakers to find the right training or relate denominative variants to the relevant legal provisions.

4.2 Insufficient dissemination of terminology

The current insufficient degree of dissemination of South Tyrolean German workplace safety terminology is particularly evident when Italian terms and acronyms are used in German texts. Acronyms can often be found alone, full forms are more likely to be placed in brackets near an impromptu translation. This may be ascribed to an insufficient knowledge of the adequate terminology in German or to the impression that the Italian designation might be better known to the audience, which proves the need for better dissemination of the South Tyrolean German terms.

An example can be found in a text published by the local health authority (Merseburger et al. 2017: 27). The authors added the Italian specialised designation *esperto qualificato* (literally ‘qualified expert’) in brackets next to a generic German term *zuständiger Physiker* (literally ‘competent physicist’) instead of using the correct designation *Strahlenschutzsachverständiger* (literally ‘expert in radiation protection’). Incidentally, in this case the German designation would have been more transparent and understandable than the official Italian term. This further supports the interpretation that the correct designation was not known or could not easily be retrieved in specialised (bilingual) resources.

4.3 Denominative gaps

As already mentioned in Section 4.1, an official German translation of the Italian consolidated law on workplace safety from 2008 is available. This is an important German reference text dealing with the main aspects of workplace safety in Italy. For most Italian workplace safety concepts, there is at least one South Tyrolean German term to be found in the translated legal text. However, not all topics are addressed in the consolidated law. Terminologists working on workplace safety detected some terminological gaps in South Tyrolean German, more precisely denominative gaps, that is, Italian workplace safety concepts for which no South Tyrolean German designation had been used or proposed yet.

This can be illustrated based on the concept of *rischi interferenti* (literally ‘interfering risks’). These risks are not mentioned in the Italian consolidated law but are relevant for daily work, especially when an organisation subcontracts services like maintenance, catering and cleaning. Whenever subcontracted staff work in the same place where regular staff of the contracting organisation work, it is possible that new, unforeseen risks emerge. For example, a risk of explosion may have been excluded for the standard welding activities of the contracting company but the moment a cleaning company brings chemical substances to their premises, a potential risk of explosion may emerge due to contemporary and incompatible work activities. Such a risk needs to be assessed and managed. For example, it could be decided that the cleaning company

must do their cleaning during the evening hours, when regular staff have finished work. There are three different types of *rischi interferenti*: a) *rischi in entrata* (literally ‘incoming risks’) that subcontractors may cause with their activities on the premises of the contractor, b) *rischi da contiguità fisica e di spazio* (literally ‘risks due to physical and spatial proximity’) that are due to the overlapping work activities of different subcontractors and c) *rischi in uscita* (literally ‘outgoing risks’), that is, additional risks – next to the usual risks – that may exist on the company premises where subcontractors are supposed to work (Menduto 2015). Since no South Tyrolean German terms for the above-mentioned concepts could be retrieved, translation proposals became necessary. Today, the respective terminological entries in *bistro* contain the following terms: a) *Risiko von außen*, b) *Risiko durch räumliche und zeitliche Nähe* and c) *Risiko nach außen*. In this way, the previous denominative gaps could be filled.

5. Different approaches to subsets of terminology

To address the above-mentioned issues in South Tyrolean German workplace terminology, different approaches were decided for legal terminology and for specialised terminology borrowed from other domains, especially from the hard sciences. While legal-terminology is system-bound and can diverge even across legal systems using the same natural language (Cao 2007: 33; Gambaro, Sacco 2018: 7-8), terminology pertaining to the hard sciences is essentially universal (Drewer, Schmitz 2017: 20). To contrast the tendency of local-only minority languages to become regionalised and to use terminology that is not understood by other (majority language) communities speaking the same language, it is advisable that the terminology used by the minority language community be as close as possible to that used abroad.

For terms coming from the hard sciences, this implies the need for better dissemination in South Tyrol of the correct and shared terminology used within the German-speaking majority language communities. In this way, impromptu translations and borrowings from Italian can be reduced. For legal terminology, it means fostering the use of shared German legal terminology whenever the foreign legal concepts are

(largely) equivalent to the Italian one, but not when the concepts differ too much. In the latter case, original South Tyrolean designations expressing the Italian legal concepts are needed. The method of legal comparison is applied in South Tyrol to assess the degree of equivalence between Italian legal concepts and Austrian, German and/or Swiss legal concepts. Based on the results of legal comparison, it can be decided whether a foreign German designation may or may not be used in South Tyrol to designate an Italian legal concept.

Examples of workplace safety terms that have been borrowed from other specialised domains are *radiazione laser* (laser radiation) and *incendio* (fire). The corresponding German terms *Laserstrahlung* and *Brand* are used by all experts of the respective domains in all German-speaking areas. No South Tyrolean would think of using different designations. However, for less common terms, it is possible that the shared German-speaking terminology is less known. This happens for example with the designation for ‘indoor climate’. Indoor climate can be defined as a complex of physical parameters, such as air temperature, relative humidity, ventilation, radiant heat, which together with metabolic activity and clothing characterise the thermal exchange between workers and their environment (Baraldi 2018: 33). In Germany, Austria and Switzerland it is called *Raumklima* or *Innenraumklima*. In South Tyrol, many texts contain the adapted loan word *Mikroklima* from Italian *microclima*. However, there is no reason to use a different technical term for this concept in South Tyrol. It puzzles German-speaking workplace safety experts coming from other countries, South Tyrolean citizens who have acquired specialised knowledge in this domain at foreign universities or during training abroad and it also introduces unnecessary denominative variation.

For terms pertaining to any subdomain of law, it must first be ascertained whether the Italian legal concept at hand has any equivalents in other German-speaking legal systems. This is done by applying legal comparison, in particular microcomparison (Ajani et al. 2018: 4; Zweigert, Kötz 1998: 4) as further illustrated in Chiocchetti and Ralli (2016). Whenever a good degree of conceptual equivalence exists, the same designation can be used also in South Tyrol. This fosters

transnational legal communication, especially considering that South Tyrol has thriving commercial, political and cultural relations with the (neighbouring) German-speaking countries. Examples are terms like *Verbotszeichen* (prohibition sign) and *Sicherheitshinweis* (precautionary statement) that have equivalent definitions in all the German-speaking legal systems or have been harmonised at EU-level. This is not possible when the conceptualisation and implementation of abstract legal dispositions differs across legal systems. An example is the Italian triplet *informazione, formazione e addestramento* (information, education and practical training). In Italy, employees must receive information, education and practical training concerning workplace safety. Each of the three Italian concepts is defined differently in the relevant consolidated law. In Austrian law, only two terms are used, *Information* and *Unterweisung* (information and instruction). In German law, the couplet consists of *Unterrichtung* and *Unterweisung* (information and instruction). Using these foreign legal terms in South Tyrol would cause misunderstandings and give a wrong impression of conceptual boundaries and of how the topic is organised in Italy from a legal point of view. For this reason, in South Tyrol the Italian triplet is rendered with *Information, Ausbildung und Schulung*.

Terminology work in the domain of workplace safety for South Tyrol has allowed to publish a large set of key terminology in this domain, filling terminological gaps and making aware of existing terminology, so as to support text drafters and translators. This contributes to reducing impromptu translations from Italian so that minority language speakers may have access to consistent and clear workplace safety texts, at least from the point of view of terminology. *bistro* is a freely accessible resource that caters for the needs of legal experts, language mediators and the general public. However, publishing terminology online is not enough to guide language use in case of excessive denominative variation. For this reason, in future we plan to add information on which designations are preferred for use in South Tyrol, in cooperation with relevant offices of the local provincial administration.

In addition, a strategy that has proven useful to disseminate correct, shared and adequate terminology is the terminological revision of e-learning modules on workplace safety. There are over 30 e-learning modules that are used every year to train employees in the provincial administration, South Tyrolean vocational students and partly also staff of private local companies on different topics related to workplace safety. The e-learning modules have all been revised, updated and made more consistent from a terminological point of view. Consequently, all those who take an online training will read and indirectly acquire correct and consistent workplace safety terminology. In 2020 and 2021, over 20,000 employees of the provincial administration and about 7,500 students have completed the revised e-learning courses (Autonome Provinz Bozen – Südtirol 2021: 100, 399). Information on whether the courses were taken in German or Italian is not available. However, given that public employees and the students reflect the numeric distribution of speakers within the province, it can be presumed that almost two thirds chose the courses in German.

Conclusions

The paper has illustrated the current situation of workplace safety terminology in South Tyrol, where German is a local-only minority language that has been made co-official at local level in the 1970s. We have addressed issues such as excessive denominative variation, the scarce dissemination of workplace safety terminology in the minority language and the existence of denominative gaps. Based on these premises, we have explained how such challenges have been addressed through terminology work. In doing that, we have distinguished the approach applied to system-bound legal terminology from the approach applied to terminology borrowed from other specialised domains that is generally shared across the German-speaking countries.

A lesson to be learnt from the South Tyrolean experience is that even non-unique minority languages and even minority languages that have been officially recognised long time ago need to continue terminology planning and terminology work. It is not an activity that can ever be considered concluded. In addition, we have experienced that

publishing terminology freely online is a useful way of disseminating it, but that it can be quite effective to act proactively, by making sure that the correct terminology is disseminated through workplace safety training material that has a wide diffusion. Finally, we still have some work to do with local stakeholders to try and counter excessive denominative variation. The plan is to enter information on which designation is preferred for use in South Tyrol in *bistro*, so as to guide text drafters and translators in selecting the most adequate designation.

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ელენა კიოკეტი

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სამუშაო ადგილის უსაფრთხოებასთან დაკავშირებული

ტერმინოლოგია:

ტერმინოლოგიური პრობლემები სამხრეთ ტიროლის

გერმანულში, როგორც უმცირესობის ენაში

ნაშრომი შეეხება ზოგიერთ ტერმინოლოგიურ გამოწვევას, რომლებიც უკავშირდება ჩრდილოეთ იტალიაში, სამხრეთ ტიროლში მცხოვრებ გერმანულენოვან უმცირესობათა თემში გამოყენებულ იურიდიულ ტერმინოლოგიას. სტატიაში მოხმობილია მაგალითები სამუშაო ადგილის უსაფრთხოებიდან, რომელიც წარმოადგენს მაღალი საკანონმდებლო მნიშვნელობის მქონე ქვედარგს. სამხრეთ ტიროლის გერმანულ ენაზე სამუშაო ადგილის უსაფრთხოების ტერმინოლოგიაში შეინიშნება ერთი ცნების აღმნიშვნელთა სიჭრელე,

ბოლო დროს შემუშავებულმა ტერმინოლოგიურმა პროექტმა აჩვენა, რომ სამხრეთ ტიროლის მხარეში სამუშაო ადგილის უსაფრთხოების სფეროს გერმანულენოვანი ტერმინოლოგია არ არის ბოლომდე დამუშავებული და ჩამოყალიბებული. სტატიაში აღწერთ მიდგომებს, რომლებსაც ვიყენებთ მუშაობის დროს არსებული ტერმინოლოგიური გამოწვევების დასაძლევად. სამხრეთ ტიროლის გერმანულენოვანი ტერმინოლოგია შემუშავებულია ან მეორადი ტერმინის შექმნით, იტალიური ტერმინების გერმანულად თარგმნის გზით (Sager 1990), ან სხვა გერმანულენოვან ქვეყნებში გამოყენებული გერმანული ტერმინოლოგიის სესხების გზით. სამუშაო ადგილის უსაფრთხოების სფეროში, ჩვეულებრივ, მეორე მეთოდი გამოიყენება, კერძოდ, ტექნიკური ტერმინოლოგია, რომელიც საერთოა მთელი გერმანულენოვანი საზოგადოებისთვის. მაგრამ ამის მიუხედავად, იურიდიული ტერმინოლოგია სისტემაზეა მიბმული (de Groot 2002) და მხოლოდ იმ შემთხვევაშია შესაძლებელი მისი გამოყენება, თუ უცხოური ცნებები იტალიურ ენაში გამოყენებულთა შესატყვისია. ეს შესატყვისობა შეიძლება შემოწმდეს იურიდიული შედარების მეთოდის საშუალებით.