

Pétria de Vaal<sup>1</sup>, Antonio Monteduro<sup>2</sup>

## TRANSLATING ARCHIVES

### Abstract

*In this paper the authors submit some general considerations about the absolute need of a translation of the archival terminology, in order to obtain an unambiguous identification of the concepts daily used during the archival activities, and a perfect coinciding of meanings in the different languages.*

*After a general introduction about the matter, a case study is presented, a case study regarding the Afrikaans language, underlining what a challenge it is to translate archival terminology into this "young" language. On the one hand, the opportunity constantly arising to create new appropriate terminology, on the other hand, the tendency and temptation to use English terminology as is. Many items are analyzed to serve as an example.*

**Key Words:** Archive, Translation, Afrikaans.

### 1. INTRODUCTION: THE NEED OF A TRANSLATION

In the first part, the present work aims to give a general overview of the problems and the challenges arising when speaking, writing and/or reading about archival science, and in the second part offers a particular study case related to a "young" language, Afrikaans. The methodology used in the paper starts from a general point of view, assuming the (obvious) fact that in order to really understand each other and, what is more important, to share the possible solutions to the problems connected with a correct managing of the archives, both traditional and digital, the most important thing is using a common, shared terminology. The work will then proceed by trying to underline the extreme importance of a mutual understanding, which can be given only by sharing the same concepts in the various languages, and in the second part, as mentioned above, the general concepts will be exemplified by taking in consideration the problems arising when building up archival terminology in Afrikaans language.

Among the many effects of the still ongoing globalisation process, one of the most important is with no doubt the need of a common standardized scientific language, aiming to better interconnect professionals from all over the world, in order to best share their competencies and knowledge.

- 
- 1 Pétria de Vaal, the owner of De Vaal & De Vaal Information Brokers cc, a Records Management and Archiving consulting and training company in South Africa. She holds a BA (Hons) degree and Higher Education Diploma from the University of Pretoria and a Post Graduate National Higher Diploma in Archival Studies (cum laude) from Technikon SA. Her latest qualification is the National Certificate in Occupationally Directed Education, Training and Development Practices - NQF 6 - Institute for People Development. De Vaal and De Vaal Information Brokers cc, Owner / Member / Facilitator / Records Management Specialist / Archivist / Heritage Specialist, South Africa, Tel: +27 -825551672, petria@devaalanddevaal.co.za
  - 2 Antonio Monteduro, senior archivist at the Executive Secretariat of the Central European Initiative in Trieste, member of the Executive Board of the IIAS (International Institute for Archival Science of Trieste e Maribor), Vice-president of the Friuli Venezia Giulia branch of the ANAI (Associazione Nazionale Archivistica Italiana - Italian National Archival Association). Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat, v. Genova, 9, 34121 - I - Trieste, Tel: + 39 040 7786 728 monteduro@cei.int.

In the field of archival science, these process and goal are much evident: the archival tradition and practice present in the various countries are often quite different one from the other, since they take origin from different administrative and legal environments, originating on their turn different ways of expressing concepts and objects.

In this sense, we should also never forget that, in spite of the fact that archives are commonly conceived as cultural goods, they are in fact *"the ordered collection of documents of an institution or individual, established during the course of her/his business and kept for the achievement of political, legal and cultural purposes"* (Eugenio Casanova). In addition, *"the archive ... was born spontaneously, such as a documentary sedimentation of an administrative, practical, legal activity"* (Elio Lodolini).

Therefore, it is vital finding an unambiguous identification of the concepts daily used during the archival activities, in order to obtain a perfect coinciding of meaning in the different languages both of the countries presently dealing with these problems, and of those countries which will have to deal with such matters.

More, in order to ensure a proper management of the archival heritage, and to avoid the risk of dispersal, or, worse than ever!, a definitive and irreparable loss, it looks quite important a standardisation (which is not by force of circumstances a trivialisation) of the technical-scientific language pertinent to the archival science. This will also supply the professionals, the private and public archival administrations, and the users, with a further instrument suitable to an unambiguous communication, aiming to establish a shared language fostering the best integration and exchange of non-mistakable data.

The fundamental requirement to best end such a process is the existence of a communal and codified language, a language enabling the crossing from a linguistic world to any other with no breaks leading to possible misunderstandings, and without being forced to get help by passing through a third language. Hence, the international production of a set of linguistic supports which let an almost literal translation; but a production that to date already shows, in my humble opinion, two fundamental limitations.

The first limitation is given by the scarcity of different linguistic universes in the available dictionaries of archival terminology. The most used languages are the usual most spoken languages in the world; the only exceptions are the ICA Multilingual Archival Terminology (<https://www.ica.org/en/online-resource-centre/multilingual-archival-terminology>) and (as we will briefly see further) the IIAS Multilingual Dictionary of Archival Terminology (<http://www.iias-trieste-maribor.eu/index.php?id=61&L>). The mutual understanding and help are made even more problematic by the absence of a common language, a common expression of the same scientific concept, and the difficulties are accentuated by the legal and administrative differences existing between the various countries.

The other limitation is the one given by the frequent non one-to-one linguistic relations. In many cases for a single term of one language, there are more possibilities of terminology in another. Or, a term only corresponds to another language by periphrasis, so that one must necessarily make the transit from one language into another through a third common language, making very often the whole process complex and misleading. And all this not to speak about "relatively new born" languages, as for the Afrikaans about which you will hear by our colleague Pétria de Vaal.

In addition, there is also another difficult, possibly the most important. As said, archival science differs among the different countries because it gems from different legal and administrative environments. Just to make an example, let us think about the great diversity existing between *common law* and *civil law*: the legal theory and practice (lead-

ing to administrative theory and practice) cannot not be compressed in a most common juridical factor, and juridical concepts leading to administrative practices cannot be shared easily and with no possibility of mistake.

How to get out of the riddle of an honest and useful translation of terminology, then? Maybe, a possible answer could be translating not the mere item itself, but translating the concept, the very particular juridical and administrative concept that led to the use of that very particular item and trying to find a correspondence in this way. It is of course not such an easy path to travel: one needs to have competences not only in the field of archival science, but also in the fields of legislation, of history, of administrative theory and practice, and so on and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

What could the archival community do, then? How could we all improve the use of a common "speaking" about archives? There are possibly two main instruments to achieve such an improving: the first is organising very frequently international events in the fields of archival science, in order to give to the archival community the possibility of sharing knowledge and competencies. The second instrument is sharing all these competencies and knowledge to the younger generations of colleagues, and this can be done by supporting and improving the number of archival science courses in the universities and by organising international events like the IIAS Autumn Archival School.

And, finally, maybe the very proper solution to the linguistic challenges, an to all the other challenges faced by the modern archival science is a teamwork. Which is also the future (or even the present too?) of our profession. The archivist is not any more (if ever she/he was) the oldish one wearing a peak and black half-sleeves, shuffling through weak lighted corridors full of shelvings carrying dusty files. The archivist is, or should become, the *primus inter pares* of a team of specialists in various disciplines (law, history, palaeography, diplomatic, fundraising, advertising...), coordinating their work in order to better manage the archive and the documentation. And one of the specialist in the team should be a linguistic expert, willing to help in analysing and comparing, and realizing a tool aimed to a better communication between different archival traditions.

One of these tools, as I briefly mentioned before, is the IIAS Multilingual Dictionary of Archival Terminology (<http://www.iias-trieste-maribor.eu/index.php?id=61&L>). Made up during the years with the cooperation of the people (lecturers and students) which attended the IIAS International Archival Day and the IIAS Autumn Archival School, it counts now 24 languages that translate a basic but nonetheless very useful set of items. The final goal being, acting as a tool for a better sharing of competencies and experiences, in order to increase cooperation and professionalism in the field of archival science. Moreover, IIAS considers the Dictionary as a perpetual work in progress, to be constantly adjusted and increased following the future modifications of the languages.

And what is more, by meanings of this accurate and precise work leading to a perfect comprehension of the contents of the documentation, the archives will not only able to be more and more shared to the people all over; but also, just because of this increased easiness in being understood, and used, they will more and more be able to fulfil one of their most important tasks: witnessing the truth.

And, by witnessing the truth, more and more becoming veritable custodians of human rights.

---

3 I am in debt with our colleague Martina Schuster of another, intriguing, solution: using an archival terminology dictionary like an app, linking the items not only one-to-one, but one-to-many, with the possibility of consulting suggested relevant entries (Wikipedia style) in case one language is not able to return exactly the concepts of another one. (Monteduro)

## 2. A CASE STUDY: AFRIKAANS

This is an attempt to explore ways of translation of terminology in the Archival workplace....and attempts to find a way to translate correctly and where a need for translation is noted (for instance where a literary translation does not convey the actual process or object which the field requires). This is also an attempt to offer a method or procedure in order to overcome the problem.

I was confronted with such a mandate when I was asked to translate and/or transcribe a set of archival terms into my mother tongue which the archivist might encounter in the workplace on a daily basis.

Some of my findings are shared here on condition that this be seen and experienced as an informal discussion rather than a formal presentation during which we can learn from each other's languages and the problems which they might pose in the translation process.

The interesting part, and that is because every language is unique and alive in its own right, is that often something goes lost and something might be gained in the process. Music terminology stays the same in scores and sheet music. "Forte" means "loud". It is never translated.

It is said of poetry that "Poetry always gets seasick when ferried to another country". I think this is applicable to translation efforts in all forms of written texts.

The Afrikaans language has a predominant Germanic vocabulary, as opposed to English that has both Germanic and Romance vocabulary. In fact, English is classified as a Germanic language with a predominant Romance vocabulary. It is also considered as the language with the vastest vocabulary of all modern languages. There is of course a whole history underlying this phenomenon, which we will not go into detail for purposes of this study.

From a practical point of view, this means that a knowledge of Latin will help the English student or speaker in order to analyse words to get behind the meaning thereof.

On the contrary, a knowledge of Latin will seldom help the speaker of Afrikaans to ascertain the meaning of a word. Where a Latin word was directly taken over into the language, the meaning will have to be learnt off by heart without understanding what the original core meaning was (word etymology) – examples to follow below.

Afrikaans is the youngest official language in the world. It is about 150 years old. It originated out of the Dutch, which was brought to The Cape of Good Hope in 1652 by Jan van Riebeeck (1619 – 1677). He had signed a contract with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to oversee the setting up of a refreshment station to supply Dutch ships on their way to the East. Van Riebeeck was accompanied by 82 men and 8 women. (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/arrival-jan-van-riebeeck-cape-6-april-1652>).

For more than two centuries, the spoken language in the later South Africa, was Dutch. According to Nienaber (1959), a Professor in Afrikaans Literature, the person who can be considered as "the father of Afrikaans", Arnoldus Pannevis (1838 – 1884), was a Dutchman by birth. He was well versed in the classical and various modern European languages. As a teacher at the Paarl Gymnasium (a local school), he had considerable influence on one of his pupils, the later Reverend SJ du Toit. Du Toit's eyes were opened to the existence and utility of the Afrikaans Language. Pannevis indirectly set the First Afrikaans Movement in motion by means of his letters advocating a translation of the Bible into Afrikaans addressed to the De Zuid-Afrikaan (Dutch Newspaper at the Cape) (1874) and then to the British and Foreign Bible Society (1874).

Pannevis realised that the spoken language was much different than Dutch and that not all the Afrikaans speakers could understand the Dutch Bible any more.

Although Pannevis was not present at the founding of "The Association of True Afrikaners" or "Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners" (GRA), one can say that he paved the way. Malherbe, who's house is now the Afrikaans Language Museum in the Paarl, Western Cape, was one of the eight founding members of the GRA, which was established in the dining room of this house on 14 August 1875. The purpose of the Association was to establish Afrikaans as a formal language.

We also have several remnants from other languages with which the Dutch language had rubbed shoulders during its development. An example is French, brought by the French Refugees who came to South Africa. The largest number of Huguenot refugees who fled to the Cape of Good Hope arrived in 1688 - 1689. By 1692, a total of 201 French Huguenots were resident at the Cape, mainly in the area of the current town of Franschhoek. Here they could enjoy religious freedom. (<http://www.hugenoot.org.za/gesk-hug.htm>).

Another language is Portuguese that also had an influence which were brought to South Africa mainly by the mariners.

The handful of amateur linguists (who started off as the "GRA" as mentioned above), struggled for recognition that a new language was born. It went through two major "movements" and a big deal of oppression before it was able to establish itself as a written and official language in 1925.

Afrikaans fought its own struggle for existence ever since... and who was its main enemy? English! About fifty years ago, there was an active movement to promote Afrikaans. The usage of words and expressions directly borrowed, translated or transcribed from English, were condemned. They were called "Anglicisms" and this word became somewhat of a swear word in Afrikaans. This caused Afrikaans to start creating and inventing its own words in almost every field of human existence: medical, sports, engineering and what not. People started compiling dictionaries for every academic field thinkable.

This stimulated the Afrikaans creativity but also resulted in some absurdities which are seldom or never used today. The tendency was to move away from any form of foreign looking or sounding words which no-one except the linguist could in any case identify. The method which emanated from this requirement as I observe it, was to rather describe a procedure or the outcome of an action rather than to use an existing set of letters already well known in English or other languages. Afrikaans must have its own word, and that was the motto and the goal.

This endeavour proved highly successful and longstanding in the end. This is maybe a method to keep in mind - describing a procedure or the outcome of an action - when translating terminology into other languages.

But as everyone knows, language is a living entity and will not stay stagnant. It is used by living entities and times change as well as events and circumstances like the appearance of the Computer and the mobile phone. Although it is generally accepted that IT-language will be English, Afrikaans has its own set of terminology, hard as it is to believe. Whether these will withstand the test of time in a world where English is the world leader in this area, will have to be observed.

The two "movements" referred to above were painful. Only later on it could be recognised as a new and independent language in its own right. My prediction is that it will shortly undergo yet another "language movement" in which more and more English words will have to be taken up in our standard Dictionaries. A very good example is the word "Taxi". Language purists fought for a long time to keep it out of our moth-

er tongue, and tried to force us to stick to the term "huurmotor" which literally means "Rented car", but "huurmotor" lost the case. The same happened to "kartonhouer" (box) which is plainly spelt "boks" nowadays but is quite acceptable. For years purists had worked to set up a list of terminology applicable to motor parts. The difficult one was "piston". If you think of a "pistol" this word describes the shape of the device. Afrikaans decided rather to use the action or function performed by the device, which is "suier" (sucker) but no one uses it in this sense, so that even if you try, you won't be understood correctly. Everybody knows what a "piston" is, and I predict that this word will become official in Afrikaans as well.

I came across a very descriptive golf-term (in the newspaper of course, because no-one would use it in everyday speech) namely "die bal het in die sukkelveld beland" for "the ball landed in the rough". "Sukkelveld" will literally mean "struggle field"...thus difficult to get out! This is an example of a very creatively invented Afrikaans word, as I said, but again I doubt whether it will become widely in use by the sportsmen themselves. This is only one of many examples.

Another reason why I foresee a bright new version of Afrikaans in the near future, is especially whereas Afrikaans has speakers from a bigger range of population than in the past, and due to political and social changes in our daily life, it will be spoken with more and more shades which will have to be acknowledged, even in the media. I think that a "standard" Afrikaans will always be important, like in every language, but Afrikaans will have to become more accommodating and will have to expand.

In this respect, I can think of at least one example. The word "song" is "lied" in Afrikaans. (It is the same in German). But nowadays singers of modern or "POP" music never use the word "lied" anymore. In this genre, "lied" had become "song", and nobody complains about it. So, the word had adopted a new semantic "shade" in Afrikaans.

Neologisms is "neologismes" in Afrikaans. This term, in itself, has been replaced by a new word, namely "nuutskeppinge" which literally means "new creations". One of these words is the Afrikaans word for "drone". This is "hommeltuig" – named after the bumble bee (the sound that it makes!).

This phenomenon brings us a little closer to the abilities of a language like English, which is known to have the biggest vocabulary of all languages. For almost every romance word, there is a Germanic synonym!

Let's get more practical and go through the list of archival vocabulary which I had worked on in order to find appropriate translations in the Afrikaans workplace environment.

To start by way of example, the very first word ACCESS (the Germanic synonym will be 'entrance') is clearly derived from the Latin word ACCESSIO which can either mean "to get closer to" or an "addition" to something. In the following words this meaning is clear in the English. But to the speaker of Afrikaans the word ACCESSIO means nothing. Afrikaans chose to apply the meaning "to get closer to" in the first instance, namely "toegang" which is compiled of two words meaning "towards" and "to go". But further on in the case of "ACCESSION" the second meaning of the Latin word was utilized namely "to add something to". The word "AANWINS" is compiled out of the words "to apply" and "value" or "profit". In other words. "AANWINS" means literally "to apply something valuable". Think of jewellery as an "ACCESSORY"!

The stem of the word "ACCRUAL" is "to grow" in Latin (ACCRESCO). In Afrikaans ("AANWAS") it is the German once again, which is visible: the preposition "aan" means "to add" in this respect and the "was" part is "wachsen" in German ("to grow"). Therefore, something that becomes "bigger".

The interesting thing, if we look further on, is that in a term like "audio visual" we see an example where the Afrikaans kept the Latin stems and meaning. This is because AUDIO ("to hear") and VIDEO ("to see") is commonly known and used in medical terminology (interestingly it is the past tense form of VIDEO, VISI, which is widely applied in other languages .... it kept the "s" sound rather than the "d" sound. Only the Afrikaans spelling in the compilation "oudio-visueel" had been adapted and utilised).

Another noteworthy example is BUNDLE which can be translated into Afrikaans as either "bundel" or "bondel". "Bundel" is used when a collection of books or documents (also literary works like verses and short stories for instance) is referred to. A "bondel" is a collection or compilation of objects.

It is unclear if the word BRIEF refers to an adjective or a verb in the workplace, therefore I had difficulty in making a final decision. We have exactly the same word in Afrikaans (also in German) which means "letter" like in writing a letter to someone. But the alternative meaning is derived from the Latin word "brevis" which means "short" and which can also mean a "summary" as most of you will be able to understand.

In the legal world for instance, if you "BRIEF" someone, you give an instruction and then you will often summarise or shorten your instruction by putting it into a paragraph or short "letter" form. In this case "brief" will have a Romance origin and "letter" will have the Germanic grandfather!

In Afrikaans there are thus these two possibilities: "Om opdrag te gee" (verb) (to give an instruction) or "kort weergawe" ("summary"). I doubt whether this has anything to do with writing a letter in the normal sense of the word, but rather to "give instructions" (verb).

The word CHRONOLOGICAL represents an instance where a Greek word withstood the test of time. CHRONOS was of course a Greek god, and he has a specific legend which surrounds him. Without having to go into the whole story, he was the one who ate his sons one by one (in 'chronological' order.... the moment they were born in order to prevent them from becoming more powerful than him and killing him when they grew up. We still use this word in Afrikaans, and even kept the Greek "CH" spelling, which is very rare in Afrikaans. "Chronical medicine" becomes "chroniese medisyne". In this sense it means "ongoing" or "continuous" which also implies the lapse of time.

The origin and exact meaning of the word "engrossed" might be unknown to most of you, but is very interesting to look at.

The word "gross" might be recognizable to those who understand German as meaning "big". So, literally an "Engrossed copy" should be a copy written or copied in "bigger format" or "font" as we say today. It might still be the case in the workplace.

The legal meaning of an "engrossed copy" or "grosse" in Afrikaans, however, is a handwritten or typed copy which is identical to the original copy. This practice was of course widely in use and even very important in times before the invention of the copier machine and/or the scanner! In the legal world the Attorney (or his secretary) had to reproduce a very precise version of the first document. A Notary had to certify this document as a true and correct copy of the original and in doing that, he had to put his official stamp on the copy. He contracts a big deal of responsibility upon himself should this afterwards be found not to be the case. This means that he had to peruse the document very closely to spot even the slightest difference.

The original meaning and reason for the copy being made in "bigger letters" is unknown today...one can just guess that maybe this was implemented in order to make the copy more visible, readable or even more solemn than the original. However, this requirement had fallen away.

This custom is however, a very old one which is even mentioned as early back as in the book Jeremiah (32: 9-12) where Jeremiah bought land in order to help an impoverished relative. The procedure is described in detail in the Bible and then mention is made of the duplicate copy which had to be sealed and put away for safekeeping, as proof that a legal sale of land took place.

The term: "CURRENT" is also problematic to translate. It is not an uncommon phenomenon that some words are sometimes seemingly quite difficult to translate, regardless of the language into which the translation is supposed to take place.

The Latinist will, however, immediately recognize the word "current" as being derived from "curro" which means to run. A current account at the bank means an "active" or "running" account. This means that the account or document is still frequently in use.

In Afrikaans we call a "current account" a "lopende rekening" which literally means "walking" or "going" account, like in "a running concern or business": Very much alive and going on on a daily basis.

The direct translation "lopende dokument" ("current document") will not go down well in the Afrikaans mouth. The same challenge applies to "semi-current" records' – difficult to translate.

I can suggest: "aktiewe" (active) or "relevante dokument" ("relevant document"), but I am still awaiting suggestions from colleagues or interested parties.

I just presume that in the absence of a real or official translation, the word "lewendig" would be used on a daily basis! This simply means a "living" document.... or a document which is still "alive'.

The term "retrieval" is an interesting one. Although it has been translated as "herroeping", it is not a common term used in an archival environment. In Afrikaans there are TWO terms related to "retrieval". The one is: "ontsluiting" which literally means "to unlock". The implication of this is the actual description / indexing of archival material as well as the making available ("beskikbaarstelling") of the archives. It was found that, when explaining "retrieval" to Afrikaans-speaking archivists, it is not that simple. It implies the TWO concepts.

### 3. CONCLUSION

It is a challenge to translate Archival terminology into the "young" language Afrikaans. On the one hand, the opportunity constantly arises to create new appropriate terminology. On the other hand, the tendency to use English terminology as is, is a temptation. Although South Africa has 11 official languages, English is the "working" language. However, certain institutional archives require archivists that are fluent in Afrikaans, due to the nature and language of the archival material.

It should also be kept in mind that relatively "young" archival material (South Africa's written history only reflected in archives as from the mid-17th century), may demand a different approach (and terminology to a certain extent) in terms of the relatively newer "types" of records.

Previously (± 15 years plus), students in archival science had the choice to study in either English or Afrikaans, as study material was provided by the relevant tertiary institutions in BOTH languages. At present, to the author's knowledge, study material is only available in English. South African Archivists in the profession should, however, always translate, create and implement archival terminology. This does not only apply to Afrikaans only, but to all the other official languages.



It is a constant need to revise archival terminology – also the list that is available in English. The reason for this is that new terms – reflecting procedures and activities - are constantly implemented in the profession and needs to be accommodated.

## REFERENCES

- Barrera, G. (2011). *Archives and Human Rights*. Lezione tenuta all'IAS Autumn Archival School di Trieste, 12-11-2011.
- Casanova, E. (1928). *Archivistica*. Lazzeri, 1928.
- De Vaal, P. and Stanton, M. (2018). *Discussion on archival terminology with language specialist*.
- Giuva L., Vitali S., Rosiellon I. Z. (2007). *Il potere degli archivi. Usi del passato e difesa dei diritti nella società contemporanea*. Bruno Mondadori.
- Hugenotevereniging van Suid-Afrika. (2008). *Who were the Hugenots?* [online] Available at: <http://www.hugenoot.org.za/gesk-hug.htm> [Accessed 2 July 2019].
- Lodolini, E. (2008). *Archivistica. Principi e problemi*; Angeli, 2008.
- Nienaber, PJ. (1959). *The Evolution of Afrikaans as a Literary Language*. Published in Lantern, Journal of Knowledge and Culture.
- Rosiello, I. Z. (2009). *Gli archivi nella società contemporanea*. Il Mulino, 2009.
- Giuva, L., Guercio, M. (2014). *Archivistica*. Carocci, 2014.
- South African History Online. (2012). *The Arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in the Cape - 6 April 1652*. [online] Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/arrival-jan-van-riebeeck-cape-6-april-1652>. [Accessed 6 July 2019].