

# COMMON LANGUAGE VERSUS SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE

Mariana Coancă<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper deals with the presentation of the common language and the specialized one. We also highlighted the relations and the differences between them. The specialized language is a vector of specialized knowledge, but sometimes it contains units from the common language. The common language is unmarked and it is based on the daily non-specialized exchange. The specialized languages are different from the common languages, regarding their usage and the information they convey. The communication of specialized information can take place within a small circle of specialists, or it can be addressed to the non-specialists (popularization). The popularization of the scientific discourse, to a smaller degree of specialization is very useful nowadays, because it is understood by many speakers.*

Keywords: common language, specialized language, lexical unit, technical terminology, specialized terms, general language.

## 1. Common language – specialized language

Generally, we can say that the specialized languages are vectors of the specialized knowledge. This remark is “obvious” and we might need, on the one hand, the answer to the questions “in relation to what are they regarded as specialized languages?”, and, on the other hand, “are we aware that a specific language is defined in relation to the common language?” We would like to establish what connections exist between them in the following lines.

Specialized languages are sub-assemblies of the common language and lexical units of the common language, too. We should emphasize that we mean by “common language” “the unmarked, unspecialized language” (the specialized language is different to the common language and the “general language” designates the whole of the language: “common language”+ “specialized language”. For Cabré (1998: 112), there is rather a difference of degree between the common languages and the specialized ones than a difference of nature; the peculiarity of the specialized languages is mainly relevant in use. Therefore, “common language units are used in situations that can qualify them as unmarked”.

The situations containing specialized languages can be considered as marked (Cabré 1998: 115). Going back to the very broad definitions

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Ph.D. student, Romanian-American University, coancamaria@yahoo.com

given above, we can say that the specialized languages are different from the common languages regarding the usage and the information they convey. We take into account the circularity of these definitions, which explains the difficulty to precisely define the term “specialized language”. We find at Cabré (1998: 118-121) a combination of different definitions of the specialized languages according to three stages:

- “the specialized languages” are linguistic codes, which are different from the common language, consisting of rules and specific units. According to this aspect, a specialized language would, therefore, be an independent language; in this case, how can we perceive a clear barrier between the specialized language and the common language? We take into account that “linguistic phenomena” that differentiate the specialized language from the common one are very important to settle a barrier between them.
- if a specialized language was a genuine specific code, it would be difficult for it to be understood by a non-specialist, because he does not know this code. But this aspect is not always valid.
- furthermore, the popularization of the scientific discourse, to a smaller degree of specialization, which is understood by many speakers, is very useful nowadays.

## 2. Common language and specialized language in e-commerce terminology

Cabré believes that there are two types of specialized vocabulary: the first one is a common platform, consisting of terms with a wider usage, and the second type of specialized vocabulary is composed of strictly specialized terms, in each field and it represents a specific scientific and technical terminology (in Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 15-16). Lerat mentions that the notion “specialized language is a natural language considered as a vector of the specialized knowledge” (Lerat 1995: 20).

Another opinion, which belongs to the descriptive linguists, emphasizes that “each specialized language is a simple version of the general language” (Cabré 1998: 119), even a simple lexical option. Therefore, there would not be specialized languages, but only specialized vocabularies. A specialized language can make use of non-lexical means even extra linguistic ones: illustrations, symbols, acronyms, etc.

For example, the e-commerce language makes use of **acronyms** and the preposition *to* is replaced by number *two* (2). We present them with their meaning:

### **B2B or (Business-to-Business)**

Companies doing business with each other such as manufacturers selling to distributors and wholesalers selling to retailers. Pricing is based on quantity of order and is often negotiable.

### **B2C or (Business-to-Consumer)**

Businesses selling to the general public typically through catalogs utilizing shopping cart software.

### **C2B or (Consumer-to-Business)**

A consumer posts his project with a set budget online and within hours companies review the consumer's requirements and bid on the project. The consumer reviews the bids and selects the company that will complete the project.

### **C2C or (Consumer-to-Consumer)**

There are many sites offering free classifieds, auctions, and forums where individuals can buy and sell thanks to online payment systems like PayPal where people can send and receive money online with ease.

### **G2G or (Government-to-Government)**

### **G2E or (Government-to-Employee)**

### **G2B or (Government-to-Business)**

### **B2G or (Business-to-Government)**

### **C2G or (Citizen-to-Government)**

The last five **acronyms** represent other forms of e-commerce that involve transactions with the government. Other **acronyms** have a high degree of specialization; non specialists cannot decode them. For example:

### **SEO- Search Engine Optimization**

### **EDI- Electronic Data Interchange**

### **PPA- Pay per Action**

### **PPC- Pay per Click**

Eventually, the “specialized languages are sub-assemblies, fundamentally pragmatic, of the language in its general sense” (Cabr  1998: 119). The notion “sub-assembly” is very relevant, because it specifies that common languages and specialized languages may have certain elements in common, being permeable to each other. To put it in a nutshell, “the specialized languages are generally in inclusion relations, intersecting with the common languages” (Cabr : 126). We noticed that *The Panlatin Vocabulary of E-commerce* contains some terms that come from the common language. The following e-commerce terms come from the common language; concerning their presence in the specialized language, we noticed that they keep their meaning from the common language to a small extent; furthermore, elements from informatics are added in order to give the meaning specific to the e-commerce field. In the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the following terms have the definitions below:

**Host** (verb): “to provide the place and everything that is needed for an organized event; to introduce a radio or television program”.

**Shopping cart** [countable]: “a large metal basket on wheels that you push around when you are shopping in a supermarket [= cart]”.

The specialized definitions are presented below:

**Hosting.** Also known simply as host. It’s the service of renting a space on someone’s computers that are connected to the Internet all the time. You have to rent this to put the files that create your virtual store and make it available to the public.

**Shopping cart.** A program that allows you to handle your virtual store. It does many things, but mainly you need it to organize your products, present them to the clients, and let them buy them.

The notion “general language” designates the whole language (specialized languages + general languages) and the notion “common language” means the unmarked

language which takes place during the daily non-specialized exchange. The same author points out that this view is based on the principle that, it is difficult to define specialized languages according to linguistic criteria, but we should also take into consideration their pragmatic aspect, which is remarkable. Specialized languages such as complex semiotic systems, semi-autonomous, used in specific contexts and specific needs, to communicate specialized information; this communication of specialized language can take place within a small circle of specialists, or it can be addressed to the non-specialists (popularization).

In Rondeau's work (1983: 23) we find the idea according to which languages should be related to the specialized vocabulary; first we should note that the terms “specialized language” and “common language” cover only a part of the language. This position is understandable, because Rondeau, deals mainly with the terms and he does not focus entirely on the specialized languages. His approach (Rondeau: 1983:25) concerning the relations between the common language and the specialized language is very relevant. He highlights the permeability of borders between the common language and the specialized language on the one hand, and the specialized languages of various fields, on the other hand. This “mobility” of the terms seems to us an essential concept, which comes either from the common language and goes to the specialized languages, or the reverse aspect. But this mobility often entails a change in terms of significance. When a term goes to the common language, it often gets a slightly different meaning, less “precise” than the specialized language of origin. We find this idea of “meaning stretch” at several authors, including Meyer and Mackintosh: ”When the term is used in the general language, it adopts a broader meaning than the meaning of the specialized field” (Meyer and Mackintosh 2000: 199).

### **3. Univocity term-notion**

The univocity term-notion is highly recognized by terminologists and it seldom occurs in the specialized discourse. Obviously, it is easy to understand that a non-specialist uses a term with an altered meaning, either deliberately or because his lack of knowledge in the field. Additionally, the monosemy of the term is not always respected, including the specialized discourses. The update of the terms in speech “exposes them” to polisemy, to some extent. On the other hand, the lexical units can become terms of the common language, but in this case, their meaning will be different (metaphor or slipping of meaning). The mobility of terms is achieved by altering the meaning. This change is achieved through a gain of significance in the following direction: specialized language → common language (by not considering the monosemy, the “interpretation” of the meaning), and a significant reduction in the direction: common language → specialized language (from all the possible meanings of a lexical unit, only one is updated in the specialized language).

The language of e-commerce in a professional context supposes the achievement of a specific task effectively, in Romanian or other foreign language. Teaching specialized languages deals with the teaching of specialized languages, adopting the concept according to which a specialized language is, above all, a specialized vocabulary. This

aspect is outlined by Gentilhomme, “the teaching theory of that time (1960), outlined that the student must firstly know the usual language, then complete his current language with an adequate scientific and technological terminology (Gentilhomme 2000: 58). The learning of the commercial language, for example, was based on some thematic glossaries. Such methods did not exist, only starting from the intermediate level, the common language being considered as known, before dealing with a specialized language.

#### **4. Conclusions**

A specialized language is not limited to the use of jargons, symbols, acronyms; it can be accessible to a large number of people. Only the degree of specialization is different. Cabré sums up this aspect: “every specialized language can be updated at different levels of specialization. The peak of the pyramid corresponds to the communication between specialists, and its ground corresponds to the communication (popularization) for the general public. (...) the subject defines the specialized language and a text does not cease to be a specialized text, as long as it aims at vulgarization, its degree of specialization being simply smaller” (Cabré 1995: 124).

The specialized fields, such as e-commerce use technical language (informatics, economics, economics), which are not known by a non-specialist. Many e-commerce terms come from English, being expressed by acronyms; thus, the e-commerce language means the use of an “encrypted” code. Only the specialists can decode it. Eventually, vulgarization plays an important role, because the non-specialists are able to understand e-commerce terms, so as to use them properly.

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