

Roxana G. Mansilla

## The Increasing Use of the “Calque” As a Translation Resource in Technical and Scientific Texts

Over the last decades Latin American countries have been receptors of a great volume of technical and scientific information generated in industrialized countries, particularly in the English-speaking ones.

This has made it necessary to translate most documents at the high speed at which technological innovations are produced, which has serious lexical implications for our language, basically a constant renewal of technical terminology and the incorporation of new words to denote new concepts for which there are no lexical equivalents in our language.

This linguistic process, which occurs in all areas of knowledge, is particularly frequent and intense in the fields of medicine, biotechnology, communications and information technology, which are highly dynamic areas in constant development.

I am going to concentrate on IT since it is a field of knowledge with which most people are somewhat familiar and which is closely related to my professional activities, both as a professor of technical translation and a free-lance translator.

As we can see in most technical translations, over the last decade there has been an increasing trend to translate new technical words by means of calques.

Let's start by revising the definition of calque. According to Valentín García Yebra, “a calque is an imitative construction which reproduces the meaning of a foreign word or expression with words from the target language.”

In the IT field there is an endless array of calques such as *faxear*, *surfear*, *clickear*, *escanear*, *rebutear*, *resetear*, *formatear*, *linkear*, *replicar*, *correr*, *bajar* and *salvar programas*, *escalabilidad*, *alocación*,

*ruteador*, *ploteador* and so on.

Why do translators use calques so often? In my opinion, we increasingly resort to calques because, when faced with the need to translate new concepts without having the time to go into deep analysis and reflection, we *intuitively* do what is in the essence of our job: preserve the meaning of the word and find an easily understandable version for the layman in the target language, sometimes, however, at the expense of purity. Later on, the language itself will validate their use or get rid of them, as it often happens with many neologisms, to find a better alternative.

Of course, it may be argued that many of these calques are unnecessary and their translation may be improved, which is also true. But, here there is another aspect which should be taken into consideration. In many cases it is not translators who coin calques. Instead, they are suggested or imposed by the professionals involved, who also have a strong influence in the lexical field of their activities. My view in this regard is that we should try to improve their translation as long as it implies no changes in meaning. For example, *establecer un enlace* is a better translation for “link” than *linkear* or *enviar un fax* is preferable to *faxear*.

But I discourage translators to introduce changes as regards the translation of new words which have already been extensively validated by use, since this may lead to confusion. Let's take the word *plotter*. If, instead of *ploteador*, we translated it as *trazador gráfico*, as some dictionaries suggest, there may be a certain degree of confusion, as not everybody would associate the latter with a *plotter*. So, we would prioritize purity to accuracy, which openly opposes the spirit of a good technical

translation. As GarcíaYebra said “the fact that a word is not found in the dictionaries is not enough not to use it. As a matter of fact, only a handful of technical words appear in common dictionaries.”

Which, then, is the criterion translators should apply? Necessity. Calques should be used as long as they are necessary and there is no better alternative.

There is another case which I would like to discuss because it shows that disregarding a calque may imply a loss of accuracy, too. Let's take the word “chat.” If instead of translating it as *chatear* we translated it as *charlar*, *conversar*, or *establecer una comunicación*, for example, we would leave aside a component of meaning. As it is used at present, *chatear* does not mean just to have an informal conversation, but a virtual and informal real-time conversation. When we think of the word *chatear*, we automatically think of the Internet. So far no other word has been coined to refer to this type of conversation

and, therefore, we would have to resort to paraphrases. But, this is not a recommendable alternative, either. Then, there's the question of register. Finally, once all other possible translation resources have been analyzed and left aside, *chatear* is still the best option.

Summing up, I would like to point out that as a professor, I usually encourage my students not to disdain the value of calques as resources that may be quite enriching both for the target language and its culture. Languages, due to their dynamic nature, need the contribution of other languages and translators should be open to such contributions as an aid to our job.

Here too, I think that striking a balance is quite important. We should try to preserve our language from the constant and increasing “invasion” of foreign languages, but not support purism to the point that it may render the language dormant. As GarcíaYebra said: “I think that languages, like peoples, need to refresh their blood.” So do I.