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THE GERMAN TRANSLATION SECTION IN THE UNITED NATIONS: HISTORY, TASKS AND CHALLENGES

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Az ENSZ Német Fordítói Részlegének története, feladatai és kihívásai. Mindig is komoly nehézséget jelentett egy olyan autentikus német ENSZ-terminológiának a létrehozása, amely valamennyi német nyelvű állam számára elfogadható. A hidegháború alatt például a részleg keletnémet alkalmazottai által használt terminológia a szocialista ideológiát tükrözte.

Az ENSZ jellemzően technokratikus és bürokratikus terminológiáját már régen kialakították, és többé-kevésbé le is fordították németre. Ez a szervezet nemzeteken átívelő tevékenységének, a szövegek sajátos típusainak és a hatalmas munkamennyiségnek (naponta több mint 200 dokumentumot kell lefordítani) köszönhető. Csakis következetes és ésszerűsített normarendszer alkalmazásával lehet megfelelni egy olyan nagy volumenű szervezet követelményeinek, mint az Egyesült Nemzetek Szövetsége, a maga minőségi és pontossági előírásaival.

„Az ENSZ-nek és különböző szerveinek multietnikumú és multikulturális közege rendkívül komplex helyzetet teremt a dokumentumok megírása szempontjából, és sajátos nehézségeket jelent a fordítók számára mind a hat hivatalos nyelvi szolgálatnál/részlegnél”. (Cao Deborah 2008. Translation at the United Nations as Specialized Translation. The Journal of Specialized Translation 1 (9), 39–54.) Ugyanez érvényes a Német Fordítói Részlegre is. Az elmúlt negyvenöt évben ez az osztály aktívan hozzájárult annak a sajátos és jól használható szaknyelvnek a kialakításához, amely valamennyi németül beszélő tagállamban alkalmas az ENSZ jogi és politikai szövegeinek átültetésére.

Kulcsszavak: ENSZ, Német Fordítói Részleg, német ENSZ-terminológia

1. Official Languages and Working Languages of the United Nations

Art. 111 of the UN Charter proclaims Chinese, French, Russian, English, and Spanish as the languages of the equally authentic versions of the Charter. A general language clause is lacking. Among the six principal organs dealt with in Art. 7 (1) UN Charter, only the Statute of the International Court of Justice determines English and French as its official languages (Art. 39 ICJ Statute). The organisation as a whole as well as the other five principal organs, from the very beginning, have been using the five languages mentioned in Art. 111 UN Charter as their official languages.[1]

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[1] Paqué 2010a.

Official languages are admitted for oral and written statements, but are neither automatically interpreted nor translated into all the other official languages of the organisation. It is the term "working language" that refers to a language into which all oral and written statements made in an official language are to be interpreted or translated.

In the beginning, only English and French were used as working languages in all principal organs, thus following the tradition of the League of Nations. The UN General Assembly made Spanish its third working language in 1948 (UN Doc A/RES/246 (III)). During the time of the League of Nations, consecutive interpretation was very time consuming so that member states decided to focus on the two languages English and French. However, after World War II, simultaneous interpretation was established as a new method and needed no extra time. Nevertheless, Russian was admitted as a fourth working language by the General Assembly only in 1968 (A/RES/2479 (XXIII)) and Chinese five years later in 1973 (A/RES/3189 (XXVIII)). In both cases, the Security Council followed the General Assembly in soon establishing new working languages.

Finally, in 1973 Arabic was recognised as both an official and a working language.

2. German Speaking States as Members of the UN and the Establishment of the German Translation Section

In 1955, Austria was the first German speaking state to be admitted to the UN. Eighteen years later, in 1973, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were jointly admitted to the UN. Liechtenstein joined the organisation only in 1990 and Switzerland in 2002.

Following the example of Arab speaking states, which had done so successfully in 1955, the then three German-speaking members, in 1973, used rule no. 57 of the General Assembly's Rules of Procedure and asked for the establishment of a small German Translation Section.[2]

On 18 December 1974, the General Assembly set up the German Translation Section (A/RES/3355 (XXIX)) which started its work on 1 July 1975. It is fully integrated into the Secretariat and its translation division, but not financed by the regular budget.[3]

In January 1982, the GDR left the translation section and ended its financial contribution. Officially, the delay in delivering translations and the high costs (to pay in hard currency) were the reason for this decision. Probably, there were not enough qualified personnel at hand as the GDR set up diplomatic relations on a large scale back then.[4]

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[2] Jaschek 1977: 19; Paqué 2010b.

[3] Paqué 1980: 167., 169.

[4] Skiver 1983: 166.

As with the UN translation division in general, the German translation section is a workplace much in demand.[5]

3. Mandate and Work of the German Translation Section

Following the founding resolution, the Section's mandate is to officially translate into German all resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council as well as the annual reports of the Secretary General, of the Security Council and of other bodies to the General Assembly and other important texts.

The translations are official UN documents and are produced in accordance with the standards and criteria set up by the United Nations. They must have public use objectives and meet the requirements for the format of the relevant types of documents. This should already be borne in mind when writing the original text, or, as the United Nations put it back in 1984: *"We must not overburden our colleagues in the translation service."*[6]

4. Challenges

One major problem has always been the identification of a genuine German UN terminology that is acceptable for all German speaking states.[7] Especially during the Cold War, a specific terminology used by the Section's staff from the GDR showcased the socialist ideology.[8]

A typical technocratic and bureaucratic UN terminology has long been developed and was more or less translated into German. This is due to the characteristics of the organisation's transnational activity, its specific type of documents, and the immense workload – over 200 documents a day need to be translated.[9] Only a consistent and streamlined standard will meet the needs of an organisation as big as the United Nations with its quality and accuracy standards.

"The multi-racial, multi-cultural environment at the UN and its various bodies bring unique complexities to document writing, hence special difficulties to translators in all six official language services/sections."[10] The same is true for the German Translation Section. Over the last forty-five years, this unit has actively contributed to the development of a specific and employable language that is appropriate for United Nations law and politics in all German-speaking member states.

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[5] For the general requirements cf. Cao 2008: 43 et seq.

[6] United Nations 1984: 4.

[7] Paqué 1983.

[8] Jaschek 1977: 22 et seq.

[9] Cao 2008: 40 et seq.

[10] Cao 2008: 52 et seq.

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