MuLex: a proposal for a legal translation-oriented TKB with graphical representation

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1. THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTRONIC TERMINOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Since the early methodological and theoretical development of Terminology in the 1960s, the structure and features of terminological repositories have always played a central role in terminological debates. In the early 1990s, Meyer et al. pointed out that

Much of the world’s terminological data is stored in large terminological databases (TDBs) [...]. These TDBs are useful only to humans, and even then to only a small subset of potential users: translators remain the principal user category, even though TDBs have obvious applications in technical writing, management information and domain learning, not to mention a wide variety of machine uses such as information retrieval, machine translation and expert systems1.

The same authors also acknowledge that “a growing number of terminology researchers [were] calling for the evolution of TDBs into a new generation of terminological repositories that are knowledge-based”2. Nowadays, such repositories are generally referred to as ‘terminological knowledge bases’ (TKBs), which can be assimilated to what Cabré defines as “knowledge

2 Ibidem.
repositories represented in a formal language that can be accessed by users via an expert system based on terminological units, which are organised into a conceptual network containing various types of relations.\(^3\)

1.1. The shift from TDBs to TKBs

TKBs can be considered as an evolution of TDBs. This evolution has been possible due to the benefits brought by the developments experienced more in general by linguistic resources in electronic format, especially as regards the creation of dictionaries. The incorporation of large-scale, general-language textual corpora has led to the development of a new generation of lexicographic resources that have influenced the methodologies used in terminographic tasks. These, in turn, have also started to complement with electronically processable textual, more domain-specific corpora, ever since the early 1990s.

Although Corpus Linguistics and the development of electronic tools for language analysis\(^4\) have been permeating both lexicology and terminography, the differences in the approaches adopted and goals pursued by the two disciplines have brought about the creation of two different types of resources containing different types of information. On the one hand, lexical repositories such as WordNet\(^5\) record words and the existing relations among them on a lexical basis, while on the other, TKBs are intended as repositories of terms rather than words of the general language. Given the close connection among terms and the underlying concepts, the relations contained in TKBs are conceptual rather than lexical and may be exploited for the acquisition of knowledge of the specialised domain the terms belong to.

1.2. The shift from TKBs to ontologies

As compared to TDBs, TKBs include more specialised-domain knowledge. In this regard, conceptual structuring is undeniably an essential part

