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**PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING MILITARY ABBREVIATIONS,
ACRONYMS AND TERMS
(based on Ukrainian and English materials)**

Modern military conflicts and the intensive development of military technologies create a constant flow of new terms and neologisms. With changes in the military industry and technical progress, the number of specialized units that need to be translated is also growing. As researchers note, each new invention or tactic causes the emergence of new terms or revision of existing ones, which complicates the work of the translator. In particular, recently, complex analytical constructs and numerous types of abbreviations have been actively included in the translation process. For example, structural analysis shows: among military terms, two-, three- or four-word complex names are increasingly common, as well as "various types of truncations, including abbreviations and acronyms".

The volume of military abbreviation vocabulary is striking in its diversity. According to one recent study, a classification of 718 of the most commonly used English-language military acronyms identified the following groups: administrative (related to personnel and organization), service (NATO terminology and everyday functions), operational (combat operations and communications), weapons and equipment, military medicine, military law, vehicles (land, sea, air), nuclear, and organization of the armed forces (Yankovets, O., 2023). Thus, a translator encounters acronyms every day from "corps commander" to "multiple-launch rocket system" and "special program for troop support." Morugova's study also confirms that about 76% of military abbreviations in English are initialisms (called by letters, e.g. IED, ATGM), the rest are classic acronyms or other forms. Such statistics explain why traditional vocabulary often turns out to be immeasurably insufficient for translation – the lion's share is made up of "strict" abbreviations, not the usual full terms.

The translator has to take into account the context and nature of the organization-nomenclature. In military structures, the same abbreviation can have different meanings depending on the branch of the army, unit or country. Ukrainian linguists note:

“Particular difficulties arise in the translation of abbreviations and acronyms, the meaning and translation of which are determined by the context and organizational affiliation.” For example, the abbreviation SVR in the Ukrainian translation refers to the “Foreign Intelligence Service”, while the English SVR refers to a similar Russian structure. In such cases, expertise and additional explanations are required. Often, acronyms are translated by tracing (directly borrowing the structure of the original) or adapted by changing the structure of the phrase. Morugova shows that the most common strategies for translating military abbreviations are calque (about 43.7% of cases) and modulated translation (25.5%). Calque helps to preserve the literal form of the abbreviation, while modulated translation allows you to change the source word so as to convey the meaning without literal copying. However, none of these methods is a panacea: in the absence of an established Ukrainian analogue, descriptive translation or even transcription with explanation should be used (Nahach, M., 2023).

The transfer of English-language military abbreviations to the Slavic context has its own characteristics. It should be noted for the first time that the mutual exchange of NATO and Ukrainian Armed Forces literature has led to a confusion of terminologies. As emphasized in English-language studies, significant difficulties arise when “translating NATO terminology into non-NATO languages” and when aligning the correspondence of military ranks of different armies. In other words, the English NCO or JFO may not have a direct equivalent in Ukrainian – one has to choose between a description (“privates without an officer”) or a borrowing (“US Army Non-Commissioned Officer”). In translation theory, this phenomenon is called context shift: the success of a translation depends not only on the accuracy of the words, but also on understanding the organizational structures and culture of the armies.

An important component of the problem is that the absence of a corresponding term or equivalent in the target language seriously complicates communication. As Samoilenko and Zolotukhina note, the translation of military terms is “extremely important” for inter-military contacts, but it is contradicted by “the absence of the corresponding terminology in the dictionary of one of the languages and the difference in cultural contexts”. In practice, this means: if an English term does not appear in any dictionary, the translator must literally expand the abbreviation or provide a note. For example, IED (Improvised Explosive Device) in Ukrainian text is often translated as “СВУ (саморабный брасновой приставки)” – that is, the acronym is rewritten in Ukrainian letters, and the full term is given in detail. Similarly, MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is usually called “МРЗВ” (реактивна система палпового возник) – here the full translation phrase is used, although the abbreviation itself is changed (Bloshchynskyi, I., 2022).

The consequence of all the above factors is the enormous responsibility of the translator. Researchers are convinced: “translating military discourse is not a simple and extremely responsible task”. Any error in this discourse can lead to “significant distortions and changes in the meaning” of the information. That is why a professional translator must possess not only language skills, but also a deep understanding of military affairs. Translating abbreviations requires knowledge of real analog objects: for example,

to correctly convey the English “warrant officer,” you need to know who this term is called in the USA and who it corresponds to by rank in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Without such knowledge, even a good dictionary may not help.

In general, the practice of translating military abbreviations shows that using only one standard approach is not enough. Some studies recommend hybrid translation methods that combine tracing, description, and adaptation in each specific case. For example, in TV series it was shown that the approach should take into account the purpose of the text and the target audience – in a military magazine, accuracy is more important than concise style, while in the mass media a compromise is possible. It is important that the translation remains concise, but also informative. On the other hand, a “simplified” translation (when the original abbreviation is replaced by a common word) can erase important nuances. Thus, the translation of military abbreviations is a balance between accuracy and clarity (Yankovets, O., 2023). Combining the methods of tracing, adaptation and contextual explanation, the translator ensures that each abbreviation or acronym conveys its original meaning. According to experts, it is best to involve military consultants in the translation and update the terminology bases to fill in the gaps in the dictionaries. Such a context-oriented approach ensures that potential “dead spots” in vocabulary will be overcome by a deep understanding of the culture and specifics of both armies, which will ensure the most correct transmission of information between Ukrainian and English.

References

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