

SHORT FORMS, LONG SEARCH: TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF ABBREVIATIONS *

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Abstract:

There is a marked lack of methodical reference when it comes to using initials, abbreviations and acronyms in Portuguese economic and financial texts, thus making it very difficult for the translator to decipher meaning. This study analyses the problem and attempts to classify these sorts of initials into categories to make translation (mainly into English) easier.

Keywords:

Economic texts; Initials; Abbreviations; Acronyms; Classification.

Resumo:

A ausência de um método no uso das siglas, abreviaturas e acrónimos em toda a espécie de textos sobre assuntos económicos e financeiros em língua portuguesa dificulta a vida do tradutor, que tem de encontrar uma forma coerente de os decifrar. O estudo analisa o fenómeno das siglas, procurando pistas para a sua categorização e mais fácil tradução para outras línguas, nomeadamente a inglesa.

Palavras-Chave:

Textos económicos; Siglas; Abreviaturas; Acrónimos; Categorização.

INTRODUCTION

One thing is certain when translating the acronyms, abbreviations and initials usually scattered throughout Portuguese economic, trade and commercial texts, and that is that the translator is in for an adventure. This means embarking on a long search in order to get to the bottom of these short forms. A series of doubts cross his/her mind as the search ensues: does the translator have to know what each abbreviation means so as to translate it, or can it be left as it is in the original language with

an explanation in brackets? Abbreviations, acronyms and initials of a group of words obviously have a different status for the user/writer than they do for the translator and it is this fundamental difference that I would like to look at in this paper (1).

"ACRONYM", "ABBREVIATIONS" AND "INITIALS" – CLARIFYING TERMS

The terms, "acronym", "abbreviations" and "initials" need to be clarified. As is common knowledge, an initial is the first letter of a word, as in MBA meaning a Masters in Business Administration or p.m. for post meridian or *DGCC (Direcção Geral do Comércio e da Concorrência)*. An abbreviation may be the initials of a series of words, as in JIT technology (just-in-time technology) or R&D (research and development), or a part of a word or words, such as, BC-NET which is short for Business Company match-makers NETwork, a European Union (EU) network. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an acronym is a composite word issuing from the initials of a series of words or parts of a compound term, giving a new term that is able to stand on its own: e.g. maser (microwave or molecular amplification by stimulated emission of radiation), or VALOREN, an EU programme to mean VALORisation of ENdogenous potential or the now fading Yuppy derived from Young, upwardly mobile professional people and which in the plural, becomes Yuppies, or DINKS for an informal classification of a social and tax status, namely Dual Income, No Kids.

More often than not, the acronym is absorbed into the language as a new term and is not translated, although there might be pronunciation variations or a slight change in spelling to accommodate each language's idiosyncrasies. Moreover, what might be an acronym in one language, might not be in another. Take the case of radar. Although it might be an acronym in English because it is derived from radio detecting and ranging, in Portuguese it is not considered an acronym but a word in its own right, that has been incorporated into the language from English. One may even argue that most English-speakers are not even aware of the fact that "radar" was initially (i.e. during World War II) an acronym.

This fact prompts a point about acronyms particularly when thinking about how a term changes its status from acronym to word when it enjoys widespread use among the general public. For example, AIDS – not as an abbreviation for Agency for International Development, or Artificial Insemination by Donors – but Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome caused by a human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). People have to think hard about what the acronym means, a fact which automatically favours making the abbreviated form into the standard word that is meaningful. The fact that the acronym AIDS is often written as Aids is telling and may be compared to the term *SIDA* in Portuguese, which is often written as *Sida*. There are also terms like *IVA* (VAT in English), Prodep from *PRODEP* (an EU programme for economic development and planning) which have become acronyms. Company names, government bodies, brand names, new, artificial, or synthetic materials, military hardware and computerised technology, not to mention new diseases are often best known in acronym form, e.g. *IPC-Anacom* (the Portuguese *Autoridade Nacional de Comunicações*), *Infarmed*, Microsoft, Endvac (computer), polyester, SAMs, Cobol, just to name a few.

USING ABBREVIATIONS IN SPECIALISED LEXIS

When compared with practices observed in business or economic newspapers and magazines ten years ago, in the last few years the media have become more aware of the need to write the term in full when first referring to it, following it up by the initials in brackets. A typical report would usually have the initials in the headline and the full version in the body of the text as the example below aptly shows. In this case translation is facilitated (2).

*CMVM quer rever formas de financiamento
A redução do volume de transacções e a ausência de operações no mercado de capitais portugueses representam menos receitas para a Comissão do Mercado de Valores Mobiliários (CMVM), mas a situação não é, para já, preocupante...*

EXAMPLE 1. "Economia", Expresso, 22 December 2001.

This layout is not always the case, though. The extract below clarifies the translator immediately in the headline.

*Em 2002, o Imposto Automóvel continuará a favorecer os veículos de grande cilindrada
O segmento dos monovolumes poderá ser a próxima vítima do Imposto Automóvel se o Governo insistir na imposição de uma taxa de 100% de IA sobre estes veículos...*

EXAMPLE 2. "Economia", Expresso, 17 November 2001.

The full term followed by the abbreviation, is not a hard and fast rule. In other words, a news report might start like this:

*Portugal é caro ou barato?
Eurostat e OCDE contrariam opinião do livro de Vasconcellos e Sá e Miguel Frasquilho.*

EXAMPLE 3. "Economia", Expresso, 17 November 2001.

The organisation, OCDE, appears in the headline but nowhere in the text is it written in full. The translator, however, will need to know that the English version is OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) which offers a slight change in meaning when compared with the Portuguese (*Organização para a Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Económicos*, based on the original

French term (3)). In the English title, things are more ambiguous and the adjective qualifies "cooperation" more heavily, whereas the Portuguese adjective, inflected in the plural, covers both nouns.

On the other hand, a regular columnist, such as Saldanha Sanches (*Expresso, Economia*) may write in his second paragraph when speaking about the 2002 State Budget and the tax system:

O que se quer rever é uma exigência bárbara contida numa norma tirânica e opressiva que obriga a DGCI a dar num prazo de um ano resposta à reclamação do contribuinte sob pena de caducidade da garantia.

EXAMPLE 4. "Economia", *Expresso*, 27 October 2001.

The reader is supposed to know that *DGCI* means *Direcção Geral de Contribuições e Impostos* although it is not written in full anywhere in the article. The translator, therefore, may be forgiven for not taking into account the particular Portuguese context of the organisation and simply call it: the General Tax Office. The author, though, may well consider this a poor translation because, in the English version it fails to carry over the idea that an extraneous regulation can have such a serious impact on a body – implicit in the Portuguese name – which is directly responsible for carrying out government policies and fiscal rulings.

The socio-cultural context of the abbreviation is implicit but far-reaching. Terms are laden with past histories or act as indicators breaking with tradition and creating new history. The weightiness and red-tape connotations behind many titles is sometimes lost in the translation. *Direcção Geral* has no really suitable translation into English, as European Union translators discovered in Brussels. They and English-speaking Euro-politicians adopted the anglicised version of the original French, *Direction Générale*, and incorporated it into Euro-speak.

Another instance where the abbreviation usually appears without clarification may be found in the stop-press column or in the "shorts" column, in either the headline or in the example below:

António Almeida demitiu-se de secretário-geral do Ministério da Economia, cargo que ocupava há um ano, encontrando-se neste momento a fazer um doutoramento. Antes da Secretaria-Geral, o responsável desempenhava funções no IAPMEI.

EXAMPLE 5. 'Passaporte', "Economia", *Expresso*, 20 October 2001.

The abbreviation *IAPMEI* (*Instituto de Apoio às Pequenas e Médias Empresas e Investimento*) is unexplained probably due to lack of space and also to the fact that it is fairly well known and its meaning is taken for granted. But it is difficult to translate. Should the translator aim for The Institute

for Investment and Aid to Small and Medium-Sized Companies followed by the Portuguese initials? Note that I have changed the word order to place the smaller lexical units first which suits English notions of rhythm and stress better. Or is it more useful to refer to the Portuguese initials first and offer a very brief explanation about what the *IAPMEI* is rather than translate it word for word? Again, it depends on the context and the type of text. Nonetheless, this point will be raised again later on.

Tables, for lack of space, are another instance of where the abbreviation appears without its extended version, although ideally there should be a footnote in explanation. In the article quoted above about motor vehicle tax, a table accompanying the article gave the following headings without any footnotes with the exception of *C.C.* (which, we are informed, means "cubic centimetres"). It is taken for granted that *PVP*, *IVA*, *PPB+IA* which all refer to selling prices and various taxes are known as the text fails to provide a key. The title and main headings are as follows:

<i>Carga Fiscal do IA sobre o Preço de Venda</i>							
<i>Marca</i>	<i>Modelo</i>	<i>PVP</i>	<i>IVA</i>	<i>PPB+IA</i>	<i>C.C.</i>	<i>IA</i>	<i>Carga fiscal do IA</i>

EXAMPLE 6. "*Economia*", *Expresso*, 5 October 2001.

Abbreviations deemed to be common knowledge are almost never clarified in tables. In a feature article (see below) discussing what the income gained from taxes was spent on in 2001, a table showing expenses in health and pensions among others, referred to *ADSE* and *CGA* without referring to full forms, although when referring to tax ceilings, the table mentioned *NF – Nível de Fiscalidade*. It is assumed that the abbreviation, *Aut. Locais*, is clearly meant to be: *Autarquias Locais* (Local Government).

<i>Despesas Rígidas</i>					
	<i>1987</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2001</i>
<i>Despesas Rígidas</i>					
<i>* Despesas Sociais</i>					
<i>Saúde + ADSE</i>					
<i>Educação</i>					
<i>Segurança Social</i>					
<i>CGA</i>					
<i>* Regiões e Aut. Locais</i>					
<i>Nível Fiscalidade (NF)</i>					
<i>Despesas Rígidas/NF</i>					

EXAMPLE 7. "*Economia*", *Expresso*, 22 December 2001.

An obvious explanation of why feature writers and columnists in the specialised press or report writers fail to clarify the abbreviations they use is that they are writing with a specific public in mind, one

which is fully acquainted with the terminology. The translator has to assimilate this terminology if he/she is to do a good job. The same may be said where company reports and the results of the annual audit are concerned. Readership is selective and presumed knowledgeable. Unless it is a public or state-owned company where the annual report is published in the press, readership is usually in-company and limited or at most, read by the company's shareholders at general meetings.

ARE ABBREVIATIONS JARGON?

It is interesting to note, however, that like most other professions, the businessman-economist-financier-trader has his specialised language, his jargon. Consequently, the journalist/writer has to become proficient in this jargon, too. It may be argued that each term in jargon has its own very peculiar and particular meaning that is hard to convey in the words of everyday current language. The bureaucratic weighting of terms often calls for abbreviations which in turn are often transformed into acronyms. For example, is the specialist able to call to mind exactly what *PIDDAC* stands for? Both he/she and the translator ought to know that it stands for *Programa de Investimento e Despesas de Desenvolvimento da Administração Central*, that it is a European Union funding programme, and that its title probably originated in French or English. The sort of terminology generated within the European Union often results in additional layers of jargon that act as a barriers to anyone wishing to join an exclusive club. In the act of transforming words into icons that are recognizable by like-minded professionals, the jargon users are, perhaps, unconsciously helping to exclude those who have "no right" to think they are included in the circle. With the excuse of saving time, what authors really do is attempt to restrict access to information to those not already "in the know". Look at the following small extract where this idea emerges fairly clearly:

De passo intermédio sem grande expressão na transição entre o GSM e o UMTS, o GPRS (General Packet Radio Services), também conhecida pela geração 2.5, prepara-se agora para desempenhar um papel fundamental na expansão da internet sem fios e no arranque do comércio electrónico móvel...

EXAMPLE 8. "Os Desafios do M-Commerce" in "Dossier Especial – Guia do e-Business", published by Grupo Sol-S (2001).

As the overwhelming majority of authors do not write with the translator in mind, no one has questioned the right to use specialised terms that are not sufficiently clear. Indeed, why should they ever think of doing so? And this is especially true when it comes to abbreviations and initials. Nevertheless, this attitude reflects one of arrogance and clubishness, contrary to the spirit of universality and flexibility. In certain cases, the reification of words into icons may also mask ignorance – the author simply does not know what the full form of an abbreviated term stands for. In other words, in becoming an acronym, the abbreviation has taken on a unique meaning that may or may not coincide very strictly

with the extended version. Take, for example, the term *Grandes Opções do Plano* which relays the idea of "broad alternatives" lending flexibility to structural economic policy planning. *GOP*, on the other hand does away with the idea of openness to choice and the term tends to portray a fixed entity: "as" *GOP* (4).

I recall Halliday and Martin's words (1993, 21), about the specialized language of the financier-economist and their increasing use of abbreviations, rendering it incomprehensible to the general reader:

The language of science, though forward-looking in its origins, has become increasingly anti-democratic: its arcane grammatical metaphor set apart those who can understand it and shields them from those who do not. It is elitist also in another sense, in that its grammar constantly proclaims the uniqueness of the human species. There are signs that people are looking for new ways of meaning – for a grammar which, instead of reconstructing experience so that it becomes accessible to only a few, takes seriously its own beginnings in everyday language and construes a world that is recognizable to all those who live in it.

Could the translator belong to this set of people in wanting to clarify terms so that they are recognizable?

Furthermore, in considering an author's purpose in using abbreviations and initials in a text, we are automatically led to ponder not only the elitism of which Halliday and Martin speak, but also the functionality and practicality of abbreviations. Are they useful because they save time (in writing, in reading)? Do they work alone – are they meaningful in themselves? Or, do they take on the status of the icon in much the same way that words do, a fact which I mentioned earlier on? Do they take on other meanings giving rise to new lexico-semantic networks? They are said as words with meanings of their own that have a more immediate impact than the initials. If they are to be treated as words – acronyms, and not initials – does the translator have to respect them as whole units or meaningful words and translate them as such from the Portuguese, precisely because they have acquired the status of words (e.g. *Sida* or *Iva*), which may go against English language conventions, or should they be treated as the initials and abbreviations they once were? While *Aids* might be acceptable nowadays, instead of *AIDS*, simply because it is a universally-understood and used term, serious doubts are raised about other terms, particularly in finance and economics.

In becoming icons, such units take on political meanings of their own are sometimes at variance with or go beyond their original meanings or that open up whole new panoramas. Many such icons originate in English simply because English is the common language for speakers of many nationalities, or because the USA played a major role in drawing up the rulings underlying the term. Thus when dealing with translation from English into other European languages, these coinages resist attempts to "nationalise" them. In the first instance, they successfully ward off any risk leading to a change in meaning – given

the common premise that translating is creating. However, in reifying a term, its status undergoes change of a different sort. It is rather like the different representations the acronym NATO has for different people, groups or even nations (5). There are some Portuguese abbreviations which came into use after the country joined the EU in the mid-1980s and which became synonymous with "hand-outs". Consider, for instance, *FEDER*, *FEOGA*, *INGA*, *PEDAP*, *PEDIP* (6) that are all to do with direct or indirect European funding of regions, agriculture, fishing, industry, roads and other infrastructures.

TRANSLATING MORE CLEARLY

The first questions the translator has to ponder and answer regarding the abbreviations and initials of organisations have to do with deciding which ones are acronyms and what are not. In the case of acronyms, they should stay as they are – not to be translated. The problems acronyms present in Portuguese however, is deciding whether terms like *PRODEP* are, in fact, initials standing for complete words, or whether they have acquired the status of acronyms. Thus the kind of problem-solving the translator has to deal with, may be summarised as follows:

- Should I translate the initials into the full version and change the initials to suit the translation?
- Should I leave them as they are but translate what they stand for?
- Should I leave them as they are, write them out in full in the original language in brackets and then translate?
- Should I leave them as they are in the body of the text and then explain in a translator's footnote or in a bracket in the text?

An attempt to answer these and other questions will be given as we go along. The first consideration in arriving at an answer is the origin of the term.

ORIGINS OF TERMS AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

It is useful to find out the origin of the abbreviation in order to know how to proceed. As economic and financial terms connected with political trade, commercial and industrial organisations are particularly prone to being abbreviated, it is here that the translator should start keeping a record of entries in his/her own glossary. For the sake of convenience, I have organised a list of three major groups of abbreviated titles, although I am sure one could open up the selection to accept more groups. The list includes the following categories about which a little will be said in the way of an explanation:

- Original English terms used in Portuguese texts in their English form so that while no translation is required back into English, there may have been slight changes (e.g. use of capital letters) in the Portuguese use that need to be anglicised once again.

- Original English (or sometimes French) terms used to name international organisations in which there is a common international interest or membership. Here, the title and the abbreviation are translated into Portuguese and need to be re-translated back into English. The danger lies in the discrepancy between the original English term and its translation back into English.
- Portuguese terms referring to a strictly national context which need to be translated.

1. Untranslated original English terms

The classical commercial terms so often seen in handling bills and texts related to the import-export side of trading keep to their original English versions: CIF (cost insurance freight), CET (common external tariff), COD (cash on delivery) etc., and new financial products also tend to keep their English abbreviations. These new services usually have to do with credit provision, leasing and auto-leasing design (e.g. ALD); e- and m-commerce (e.g. GTW – Global World Trading, SCM – Supply Chain Management; B2B and B2C services (7)), and launching or privatising companies (e.g. CHIPS – Clearing House Interbank Payments System, SDR – Special Drawing Rights, IBF – International Banking Facility, ATS – Automatic Transfer Service). Even the popular *Multibanco* cash points are increasingly referred to (erroneously in some cases) as ATMs (automatic telling machines) while PINs and IBANs remain in their English version.

Abbreviations originating in English or French – for instance the United Nations and other worldwide organisations (e.g. UNESCO, SADC, EFTA, etc.) rarely, if ever, change when translated into Portuguese. Consequently, they present no problem when translating a Portuguese text into English. Among the young today, even the North-Atlantic military alliance, NATO, has ceased to be referred to as *OTAN*, although this may not be the case among older speakers, particularly if they are in the higher ranks of the armed forces. The terminology falling under the European Union heading is, however, divided. While some terms – such as the acronyms ECOFIN (Economic Committee for Financial Ministers), EFMD (European Fund for Management and Development) and JET (Joint European Torus) are used as such, possibly because they refer to exclusively Brussels-based EU organisations, others may be translated. Entities like the DG IV, Q III, BERD, etc. are usually left in their original French or English perhaps because they appeared and became current coinage long before Portugal joined the Community in 1986. Even the ECU (European Currency Unit) was adopted in this form by all EU countries, regardless of language variations.

The names of economic control mechanisms, financial instruments and marketing concepts are very often left in English, the language in which they originated. Take for example, the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission), the PER (price-to-earnings ratio) when talking about the ratio to evaluate shares in relation to their dividends; the MATIF which comes from the French and means *Marché à Terme des Instruments Financiers*, an SDR (Special Drawing Rights) or CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and MOU, or MoU (Memorandum of Understanding). It is not hard to understand why such abbreviations are kept if we recall that the current language of international finance and business

is English. What reports sometimes do (or should do), however, is add a quick explanation – not a translation – of what the term means if they think that the readership is not specialised.

2. Translated titles of international organisations

World-sponsored organisations in which Portugal has a say, such as the United Nations Organisation (UNO) and its different sections dealing with human rights, health, atomic energy, trade and development, drug and crime prevention, etc. are translated (UNO/*ONU*, UNO HCHR/*ONU ACDH*, WHO/*OMS*, IAEA/*AIEA*, UNCTAD/*CNUCED*, UNODCCP/*GNUCDPC*, etc.). Some UN organisations, however, are left in the original English: FAO, Unicef, etc. The reasons are not clear but it surely has something to do with how well publicized some UN programmes are internationally speaking. Other supra-national political, banking and trade alliances are also translated: the OAU (Organisation of African Unity), the IMF (the International Monetary Fund), the WB (World Bank), the World Economic Forum (WEF), OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum-Exporting Countries), WTO (World Trade Organisation), *ZEE (Zona Económica Exclusiva)* and *SME (Sistema Monetário Europeu)* – or the *GAFI (Grupo de Acção contra o Branqueamento de Dinheiro)*, with its headquarters in Washington to name just a few.

Due to the EU policy enshrining the rights of all member states to use their own languages, most of the abbreviations and initials scattered throughout EU reports and policy-making documents are translated. Thus the ECB (European Central Bank) becomes *BCE*, the European Investment Bank (EIB) is *BEI*, the European Monetary System (EMS) is *SME*, the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ECTU) becomes the *CES*, and so on. When it comes to funding, following EU directives in various areas of economic and financial activity, and applying programmes, the abbreviations are translated into Portuguese – as mentioned earlier on in this study – and often give birth to new Portuguese acronyms: *FIDES (Fundo de Investimento para o Desenvolvimento Económico e Social)*; *FEOGA (Fundo Europeu de Orientação e Garantia Agrícola)*, *CEDEFOP (Centro Europeu para o Desenvolvimento da Formação Profissional)*, *IFOP (Investimento Financeiro de Orientação de Pescas)*, *UNICE (União das Indústrias da Comunidade Europeia)*, etc.

As Portugal belongs to a broad community sharing basic political and economic as well as cultural precepts and practices, it has organisations and regulatory practices akin to other countries within the community. It has its non-governmental organisations (NGOs-*ONGs* (8)); its wealth as a nation is calculated on the basis of its Gross Domestic Product (GNP-*PIB*); it sets value-added tax on its consumer goods (VAT-*IVA*), battles with its Public Debt (PD-*DP*), adheres to International Accountancy Rules (IAR-*NIC*) and allows its trade unions to become affiliated with the International Labour Organisation (ILO-*OIT*). On the basis of its wealth of abbreviations could this allow Portugal to swell the G-7 to G-8?

Furthermore, when concerned with the stock market and financial products available through government or banking entities, although words are usually written in full, the translator might stumble upon an abbreviation, such as the simple TB (Treasury Bonds) which would be *BT (Bilhetes de Tesouro)* in Portuguese or the more complicated *Fundos de OTFI (Obrigações de Taxa Fixa Internacional)* – not

to mention other kinds of stocks, shares and bonds, such as the *OTs* (*Obrigações de Tesouro*), the stocks or títulos called *TRMs* (*Títulos Renda Mensal*), and *TIMs* (*Títulos Internacionais Mistos*), the saving schemes such as *PPR* (*Plano de Poupança Reforma*) or shares buying and selling (IPO-*OPAs* and *OPVs*).

Finally, in this section, it should be mentioned that some translations of "international" concepts and classifications into Portuguese follow the usually English original very closely. Take for example, the two abbreviations for newly developing countries (NDC) and developing countries (DC). In Portuguese they are: *NPI* (*Novos Países Industrializados*) and *PVD* (*Países em Vias de Desenvolvimento*). Unless dealing with a strictly Portuguese phenomenon, the tendency is to adopt a close translation of the English wording when labelling general aspects. However, where a term has taken root, no matter how "prestigious" the new abbreviation because it demonstrates the speaker is in-the-know, it is usually hard to get rid of among the general public (see my previous comment on the specialist preferring the term ATM which refers to the sales point or machine, while the general public still prefers to use the word *Multibanco* for both the physical sales point and the banking transaction as it has done for the last 10 to 15 years).

When transcribing the translated terms in this group, the full version may be accompanied by the initials of the translated words if the term is going to be used again in the text later on. As the Portuguese version is close to the English, usually referring to an international – or rather, not a strictly national – context, the translated abbreviation or acronym probably already exists.

3. Portuguese terms in a national dimension

Herein lie most of the translator's problems. There may be no corresponding organization or operation in the target language and a full translation is essential. The very wordiness of Portuguese titles begs an abbreviation simply because they are too unwieldy to write in full form or they do not lend themselves easily to an abbreviated version composed of one or two words. Take for example the fairly well-known acronym, the *IFADAP* (*Instituto Financeiro de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento da Agricultura e Pescas*) in use particularly when discussing community fishing quotas, or the even more impressive abbreviation, *PNICIAP* (*Programa Nacional de Interesse Comunitário de Incentivo à Actividade Produtiva*), which however, is not an acronym. As previously mentioned, these terms have taken on meanings of their own and only a very few would be able to say what the initials stand for. Nevertheless, the translator has to be in a position to render a close English approximation to the Portuguese term.

As far as economic and financial language is concerned, Portuguese abbreviations and acronyms may be divided into a number of different groups which, when viewed diagrammatically as a funnel, contain several strata. The abbreviated term has to be situated along a continuum within a context, located somewhere in the hierarchical down-grading following the larger, broad-based "national" units into the small local operative units. It is rather like trying to find a niche in a semantic group based on the Stock Exchange for each of the following terms: the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) at EU level, the *FII* (*Fundo de Investimento Imobiliário*), the *CNBV* (*Conselho Nacional da Bolsa de Valores*),

the *OECVM (Organismos de Investimento Colectivo em Valores Mobiliários)*, the *ABVL (Associação da Bolsa de Valores de Lisboa)*, the *SCP (Sociedade de Correctores Portugueses)*, the *OEVT (Operadores Especializados em Valores do Tesouro)*, and the products dealt with (e.g. *FMMEuro [Fundos do Mercado Monetário Euro]*, *BTs, OTs, PPAs*, etc.).

In trying to understand the contextualised situation of an abbreviation, it is possible to minimise errors in transcribing the term in full. But it also means that the translator should not really venture into fields where he/she does not have sufficient background knowledge. Things have to make sense as it will probably be a specialist reading the translation at the other end.

The experienced translator often has inklings about what the first initials in a term stand for in a long line of letters: for example, *C* might stand for *Conselho, Confederação, Centro* or *Comissão*. Often the context is the only guide. Ideally speaking, one's own experience is really the only source of clarification barring personal contacts who would be "in the know". On-line services to do with the subject at hand are, perhaps, more rewarding if one knows what one is looking for and where to find it. Does this mean having to wade through paper and digital texts in order to discover what an abbreviation or an acronym means? Very often it does. That is why compiling a glossary is essential.

Once the full version has been found, what is the next step? The title has to be translated or at least described if a faithful translation is difficult to contrive. The Portuguese abbreviation – the name under which it is most commonly referred to should follow this translation in brackets in italics. If the title recurs throughout the text, the translator should use the Portuguese abbreviation merely because a translated version of the full title is not really enlightening or useful when referring to a particularly Portuguese context. There is really only one cut-and-dried rule concerning abbreviations: and that is the full version of the term must be supplied. Whether the translator opts for a literal or loose translation of a long title or prefers giving a brief explanation, depends upon the text, the client's wishes, the (imagined) reader and the translator's own practice.

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to show in this study, is that the seeming anarchy portrayed by the abbreviation and the acronym in Portuguese may, after all, not be as confusing as it first appears. Although any translator will be daunted by texts in which abbreviations of titles fail to be accompanied by a full version of the term or at least a brief explanation, if the abbreviation is analysed and placed within a context and is considered both morphologically as well as semantically, many questions about how to proceed will be answered. There are terms which resist translation because they have gained weight and status throughout the years and have taken on additional or changed status to their meanings. Such terms are very often in English and will appear in Portuguese texts in their original forms. Obviously the translator has no problem here and will adapt any slight changes in spelling or orthography that could have taken place in the Portuguese rendering of the term, so that it returns to its inherent Englishness.

Other terms, because they belong to what may be called "world patrimony" in which all nations or language groups have some sort of a say, are found in translated forms but are easily re-translated back into their often English originals. The translator's problem here is his/her own ignorance of the English original but Internet sources are an increasing help in locating terms and their abbreviations and it is not too problematic to see the context in which a term is used. The match between the English original and the Portuguese translation might sometimes be less than clear so that getting a term back into an English translation would need cross-referencing for certainty.

The group that is most worrisome to the translator, however, is the third and largest group of nationally-bound terms. It should be remembered though, that translation is not an exact science even though the texts we are translating may express precise data and evidence. Language is open-ended, flexible, creative and communicative. If the text's interactive nature (i.e. the writer with the reader via the text) is to be respected, the translator should always be in a position to rely on his/her own common sense and should always enjoy enough freedom to make a wise choice. While a translation of the Portuguese term is needed, whether in a bracket following the term or in a note, it is advisable to use the Portuguese acronym, abbreviation or initials in the translated text itself (written in italics, if need be) once it has been explained. It is up to the translator to decide if the abbreviation should be written out in full in both English and Portuguese, although, personally, I have found the English translation suffices. It should be remembered, however, that readers of translated texts need to understand what the Portuguese context holds, and this sense of reality may be projected in a Portuguese abbreviation. It follows, then, that the Portuguese abbreviation be written in its original form.

The insulated nature of specialised texts filled with abbreviations that only the specialist is able to read with any degree of confidence, should not intimidate the determined, knowledgeable translator. Nevertheless, being prepared to confront such challenges means that the translator has to be armed with his/her own glossary and other paper and digital reference tools – all the more so if one is dealing with Portuguese economic and business texts. ■

* This article is a modified version of what appeared in the magazine, *Polifonia 5, Revista do UNIL-FLUL*, Lisboa, Colibri, 2002.

1. Right from the start, I would like to thank my students in the Faculty of Letters, Lisbon University, post-graduate translation course (1990-91) for some of the terms I have used in this study. I have taken them from our unpublished glossary of the abbreviations of economic and financial terms. In addition to data I took from texts I was translating at the time, we used the following Portuguese newspapers and magazines: *Expresso*, *Diário Económico*, *Exame* and *Público*. The recent work I have done in this field acts as a tribute to this first joint effort.

2. All references to the initials, abbreviations and acronyms of recent terms used in this article have been taken from texts in the Economic and Employment supplements of the weekly Portuguese newspaper, *Expresso*, August to January 2002.

3. As it may be known, much of the terminology and literature about the initial institutional structures and their rulings were in French, issuing as they did from the OECD headquarters, Paris. The gradual encroachment of English as the major working language has happened in the last 20 years or so.

4. This example was taken from a report in *Expresso* Supplement, November 10, 2001.

5. A term such as NATO is given loaded socio-political and even civilisational connotations and can spark off street demonstrations and effigy-burning and place opinion-makers in opposite camps of thought. The unsuspecting would never guess that the very ambiguous North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation may be interpreted to mean an all-powerful military alliance of Western-type democracies spear-headed by the USA. GATT (General Agreement for Tariffs and Trade) is also semantically laden. To nations not covered by the Agreement, the acronym is automatically associated with exclusion. Likewise, the IMF or FMI (*Fundo Monetário Internacional*) for many developing countries is synonymous with the idea of unsolvable national debt and continued economic subjugation to the powers that be. On a less dramatic scale, however, many apparently neutral abbreviations describe unpopular European Union (EU) policies or organisations, e.g. the CAP (or PAC – *Programa Agrícola Comum*) the mention of which immediately raises the hackles of French, Spanish and even Portuguese farmers, or the EMS / *SME (Sistema Monetário Europeu)* which is likely to bring a sneer to British Euro-sceptic faces. The translator may only choose to forget the socio-cultural dimension contextualising even an abbreviation at his/her peril.

6. FEDER – *Fundo Europeu de Desenvolvimento Regional*; FEOGA – *Fundo Europeu de Orientação e Garantia Agrícola*; INGA – *Instituto Nacional da Garantia Agrícola*; PEDAP – *Programa Específico de Desenvolvimento para a Agricultura Portuguesa*; PEDIP – *Programa Específico de Desenvolvimento da Indústria Portuguesa*.

7. B2B means "business to business" where a service is offered by one company to another at the same hierarchical or organisational level, while B2C means "business to a different kind of organisation" which could include governmental departments or local authorities, etc.

8. The evolution from the term pronounced as initials in Portuguese: as *O.N.G.* into an acronym: as *Ong* is already a reality particularly in the Portuguese-speaking African countries like Mozambique and Angola. It apparently shows the general acceptance and frequent use of the term which has acquired a meaning in itself and which dispenses with the meaning tied up in the extended version.

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