Military Terminology in the Subtitles of *Band of Brothers*

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Abstract. The present article investigates issues of military terminology in the Hungarian and Romanian subtitles of the highly popular TV mini-series *Band of Brothers*. The introductory part offers a brief presentation of terms, possible definitions, and their relevance for translators/subtitlers, and then – based on a possible mind map of military terms, including army units, equipment, ranks, commands, tactics, rewards, and punishments – we analyse samples belonging to army equipment and ranks (commanders) in the Hungarian and Romanian subtitles, arguing for the importance of reliable sources and consistency, which directly contribute to the quality of translations or subtitles. A special field of investigation may be represented by the specific military abbreviations and acronyms, which may offer an objective insight into the level of expertise of the translators/subtitlers.

Keywords: US Army, equipment, ranks, subtitle, mind map

1. Introduction to terms

A possible dividing line between professional or expert translators and amateurs may be the knowledge of specific terminology of one or more particular fields such as *law*, *medicine*, or *economy*.

While amateurs are usually keen on a very limited area, becoming fanatically experts regarding a particular issue (e.g. translating/subtitling scripts on how to assemble a high-quality audio system for personal use), they might not be able to pursue and extend their interest in the long run. Professionals, on the other hand, submerge in larger areas, have a keen interest in finding the best terms in the languages involved, also knowing the importance of creating specific term bases, which are constantly updated: new entries may be added, wrong ones deleted or modified, or new meanings added to old ones. This last remark leads us to certain

issues regarding terms, as we have to discuss the nature of terms, starting with possible definitions.

It is known that *lexicology* deals with words (general meaning) and *terminology* deals with terms (terminus technicus) having specific meaning(s) (cf. Sager 2001: 259). Thus, terminology is on the borderline of language studies, logics, ontology, informatics, and sciences (Pusztai 1980: 7, qtd in Kis 2005: 105), which means that terms are specific words or combinations of words (phrases) with particular meaning in a special context, or – in Bowker's formulation – terms "are lexical items belonging to specialised subject fields" (2003: 49) and collecting them in a terminology-management system (TMS) has important benefits: speed, flexibility (frequent updates are necessary), quality, possibility to change the nature of the task, and shareability (cf. Bowker 2002: 86–88).

The quality of terms over common words starts from certain requirements and characteristics (cf. Heltai 2004: 28–29, Kis 2005: 106–107):

1. preciseness (meaning is only for a given concept, no overlap whatsoever is allowed with other terms), terms having a clearly defined meaning;

2. terms have only one meaning and have no synonyms;

3. explicitness (the concept must be clearly covered by the term), excluding polysemy;

4. terms are always used in the same sense (they are not context-bound);

5. terms are used only by a certain group of speakers belonging to a specialty;

6. the majority of terms are compound words or combinations of words.

On the negative scale:

7. the meaning of terms cannot be extended or reduced (cf. point 4);

8. terms are not characterized by connotation;

9. terms are not characterized by emotional meaning.

As theory and practice never fully match, terms may overlap, can have multiple meanings, and may have emotional content (Heltai 2004: 32). Since the advent of (semi-)automated translation, the importance of term bases has increased as they directly contribute to consistency (quality assurance), leading to a better quality, at least in theory. The basic idea of term banks or term bases is rather simple: having a predefined list of terms (usually in two languages) will result in both better and faster quality. However, we should consider that the automatic collection and filtering of terms (cf. huge online databases scanned by search engines) will also contain many wrong and foreign terms (especially of English origin), without having time for a systematic arrangement (cf. Kis 2004: 47). Yet, the online access to term banks "was one of the earliest envisaged CAT tools" (H. Somers 2003: 20).

As the number of term banks constantly grows, competing terms will inevitably appear, which is vital for subtitlers due to the specific requirements of subtitles (e.g. limited length of lines). In the case of competing terms – as Bowker suggests in

Baker and Saldanha (2009: 287) –, we should favour pragmatic reasons of selection such as *economy* (shorter term, easier to write and remember), *transparency* (more precise, less ambiguous), and *appropriateness* (more widely used).

When translators or subtitlers are faced with competing terms, it may happen that they use them arbitrarily, not being able to "hit the nail on the head" in case of parallel terms for a specific field. Gutt makes an interesting remark: "[a] technical translator has no right to create neologisms…whilst an advertiser or propaganda writer can use any linguistic resources he requires" (2000: 388). The likelihood for a translator or subtitler to choose an inadequate term is very high unless (s)he "owns" a proper term bank[1] or (s)he is a specialist in the field.

Consistency may prove how successful a term has become, and we have come across a very original definition of terminology relying on this idea: "terminology is everything that spoils the intelligibility of translation if translated inconsistently"[2] (B. Kis–Lengyel 2005: 56). Using this as a guideline, we should map the military terminology used while creating the transcripts of *Band of Brothers* and how consistently this was translated by the subtitlers into Hungarian and Romanian.

2. Mind mapping the terminology of *Band of Brothers*

As the TV mini-series is highly successful, being among the top three (together with *Planet Earth* and *Planet Earth II*) on the Internet Movie Database rating list (as of 2018),[3] we tend to believe that a considerable number of Hungarian and Romanian viewers have seen the series subtitled in their native language. Moreover, knowing that both subtitles have been created on behalf of the *SDI Media Group* (Hungarian subtitle by Miklós Vincze, Romanian subtitle by Alexandru Gheorghia), we have high expectations regarding the quality of subtitles.

After having watched the entire series, we started to collect entries for the term base in an Excel file, reaching to almost 1,000 terms, out of which 425 records may be connected to military terminology. Then we created categories, the starting point being Vlakhov and Florin's categorization of *military realia* (Vlakhov–Florin 1980), the English version being available in Klaudy (2003: 205–208); they mention *military units*, *arms*, *uniforms*, *ranks*, and *assignments*. Their categorization, although focusing primarily on *culture-bound terms*, or *lexis* (cf.

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1   A term bank may be created professionally (extracted while translating in computer-assisted translation tools (such as *SDL Trados* or *memoQ*), which is then saved separately for reuse (e.g. in .csv format) in another translation software or even to be opened with the help of Microsoft Office Excel.

2   In original Hungarian: "Terminológia mindaz, amelynek inkonzisztens fordítása a fordítás érthetőségét rontja" (author's translation).

3   https://www.imdb.com/chart/toptv?ref_=tt_awd (accessed on: 9 September 2018).

Chesterman 1997, Katan 1999) – presented extensively in Mujzer-Varga (2007: 64) –, is visibly curtailed as they must have created it on the available examples.

We have extended their categories, including subcategories as well, which is nevertheless final, but for which we have examples too, knowing that no categorization may be finished as new terms are constantly created, not to mention the issue of overlapping categories or interdisciplinary fields (e.g. *military history*). *Table 1* contains the possible mind map drafted from samples of *Band of Brothers*:

Table 1. *Possible mind map of the US Army*

THE UNITED STATES ARMY

2. EQUIPMENT	1. BRANCHES OF SERVICE	3. RANKS
		Soldiers
Buildings	Army	NCOs
Vehicles	Air Force	Officers
Gear	Marine Corps	Commanders
Weapons	Navy	
Health	Units	

6. MILITARY TACTICS	5. EVALUATION OF COMMANDS	4. COMMANDS
		Orders
		Offensive
Strategy	Rewards	
Offensive	Punishments	Defensive
Defensive	Insubordination	Command taken
		"Permissive"

As we have already analysed translation/subtitling issues regarding US Army *branches* of service, revealing that military units (formed by groups of people: *battalion*, *platoon*, *squad*, etc.)[4] are the most prone to be mistranslated, in the present article, we focus on *equipment* and *ranks*. Before highlighting mistranslated or misinterpreted terms, we mention that two bilingual dictionaries were of great help: an English–Hungarian (*Angol–magyar katonai szótár* 1985) and an English–Romanian (Cojocaru 1976) dictionary, corroborated and completed with a great number of reliable online sources (glossaries, databases, reference books) as well as an expert in pyrotechnics.[5]

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4 (Imre, *in press*).
5 We would like to thank here the contribution of Balázs Rappert, an expert on pyrotechnics, for his valuable help regarding the types of firecrackers.

2.1. Equipment

Buildings or similar facilities are usually translated properly (e.g. *barracks*, *garrison*, *headquarters*, *mess kitchen*), even if there are plenty of them.[6] However, a special attention should be dedicated to military abbreviations and acronyms, as they may be misleading; consider our example (the square brackets after the English example refer to the number of occurrences):

1) *OP* (*observation post/patrol, outpost*) [8]

> *Get that **OP** in!* (S1E03, 39:19); *I'm pulling the **OP** in.* (S1E03, 39:36)
> Hu. *Hozzák az **aknavetőt**! **Aknavetők**.* ('grenade launcher')
> Ro. *Să vină **operatorul radio**!* ('radio operator'); *Întrerup **legătura**.* ('connection')

However, later on (in episodes 6 and 8), the subtitlers translate *OP* correctly (Hu. *előretolt*; Ro. *punct de observație*).[7]

The next batch of military equipment we identified is *vehicles*. Clearly, both translators offered good solutions, often applying over-translation by adding an extra word to the vehicle names or types:

2) *C-47* [3]

> Hu. *C 47-es **repülőgép*** 'airplane'
> Ro. ***avionul** C47* 'airplane'[8]

3) *Tiger* [3]

> Hu. ***Tigrisek**.; A fritzeknek voltak **tigriseik*** 'The Krauts had tigers.'
> Ro. *Un tanc nemțesc* 'a German tank'; *3 **Tiger*** '3 Tiger'

Example 3 shows that the Hungarian subtitler considers the viewers are experts enough to realize that *Tigers* are German tanks; yet the brand name is not capitalized, and so the second sentence may be misleading. The Romanian subtitler uses explicitation, and then he only mentions the brand name.

The next group of terms belongs to *military gear*, such as *barrel*, *blanket*, *canteen*, *chute*, *footlocker*, *helmet*, etc., which were translated properly. Along with gear, the army also distributed at least five types of rations, among which *K rations* are mentioned in the series:

4) *K rations* [2]

> Hu. *Ellátmány* 'supplies'
> Ro. *Rații K*

What we miss from the translations is the fact that these are "individual 'assault' rations for paratroopers" (Hu. *egyéni 'harci' (élelmiszer)adag*; Ro. *rații*

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6 E.g. Administrative Facilities, Ammunition Storage Facilities, Commissary Facilities, Correctional Facilities, Fortifications. At: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_building; accessed on: 6 June 2018.

7 Even if the English–Romanian dictionary specifies *punct de observare* (Cojocaru 1976: 392).

8 Although we can observe that the official name is C-47, the hyphen occasionally disappears in both the Hungarian and Romanian subtitles.

individuale de luptă), and even if subtitle lines are limited to a certain number of characters (usually around 35, but no more than 43),[9] this could have been specified on its first occurrence.

Figure 1. *K rations, US Army, WW2*

5)   *bullet(s)* [4]
Hu. *golyó*, *lövés*
Ro. sg. ***glonte(le)***, pl. *gloanțe*

Although this is an easy and widely known term, the Romanian term (sg.) is a regional variant of the standard *glonț*, while *glonte* is either an archaic form or originates from the Moldavian part of Romania,[10] offering a clue about the subtitler's background.

Figure 2. *German "Potato masher" WW2*

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9   Cf. http://www.kration.info/ – accessed on: 8 June 2018.
10   Cf. https://dexonline.ro/definitie/glon%C8%9B – accessed on: 8 June 2018.

6) *potato masher* [2]

      Hu. *aknavető; krumplinyomó*

      Ro. *jucării* 'toys', *s-a ars cu oala de cartofi* 'he got burned by the potato pot'

This term refers to a German hand grenade (*Stielhandgranate 24*, *StHgr 24*), and so both the English and the Hungarian version use a slang term describing the looks of the famous weapon (*Fig. 2.*), while the Romanian subtitle offers misleading terms on both occurrences.

Example 7 below contains multiple terms, loosely related to weapons; they are in fact different versions of firecrackers mentioned by a soldier remembering his childhood:

7) *I loved to make my own **firecrackers**, **cherry bombs**, **ladyfingers**.*

      Hu. *Nagyon szerettem **patronokat**, **fürtösbombákat** robbantani.*

      Ro. *Îmi plăcea să-mi fac singur **rachetele** şi **petardele**.*

We are all familiar with *firecrackers*, while we should know that *cherry bomb* is a much more powerful firecracker than the standard one, and the name describes its shape.[11] On the other hand, *ladyfinger* is a small type of firecracker.[12] The Hungarian subtitle uses two terms instead of three, and *patronok* can substitute successfully (cf. character economy in the case of subtitles) both *firecrackers* and *ladyfingers*, obviously disregarding the difference in firepower. The Romanian *petarde*, similarly, may stand for both *firecrackers* and *ladyfingers*, leaving to check the case of *cherry bombs*.

Although it is easy to translate the term as the combination of two words (Hu. *cseresznye + bomba*; Ro. *cireaşă + bombă*), the meaning would be distorted because it is not a bomb but a firecracker, after all. Even if there are online sources to offer *cseresznyebomba* (Hu.) and *bombă cireaşă* (Ro.), these terms are misleading, and we would opt for *gömb-petárda* and *pocnitori*, respectively. The Hungarian *fürtösbomba* is completely wrong as it stands for the *cluster bomb*, which is "designed to kill personnel and destroy vehicles", while the effect of Romanian *rachete* 'rocket' or 'missile' is clear. Thus, neither subtitler is up to scratch regarding this term, knowing that the setting is the Fourth of July viewed through the eyes of a kid (S1E7, 32:18–32:27).

The last group within *equipment* is connected to *health*, even if few items are mentioned – *medical supply*, *stretcher*, *Syrette*, *aid kit*, *scissors* –, which represented no issues for the subtitlers.

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11   https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/cherry-bomb – accessed on: 6 June 2018.

12   https://www.fireworksforever.com/products-page/firecracker/ladyfinger/ – accessed on: 6 June 2018. Also clarified with the pyrotechnics expert mentioned before.

2.2. Ranks and commanders

All regular armies are characterized by strict internal rules, which is possible as a well-established system is in function, called 'chain of command':

> According to its proponent Henri Fayol (1841–1925), the more clear cut the chain of command, the more effective the decision making process and greater the efficiency. Military forces are an example of straight chain of command that extends in unbroken line from the top brass to ranks. Also called line of command.[13]

As the army is divided into smaller groups of people within branches of service, each smaller unit has a commander, as presented in *Table 2* below:[14]

Table 2. *Typical army units and commanders*

Units	Commander		
	English	**Hungarian**	**Romanian**
region/theatre	*Six-star rank Commander-in-chief*	*Hadseregek tábornoka Marsall*	*Mareşal*
army group/front	*Field Marshal Five-Star General*	*Hadseregtábornok Tábornagy*	*Feldmareşal*
army field army	*General*	*Vezérezredes*	*General de armată*
corps	*Lieutenant General*	*Altábornagy*	*General-locotenent*
division	*Major General*	*Vezérőrnagy*	*General-maior*
regiment	*Colonel Brigadier General*	*Ezredes Dandártábornok*	*Colonel General de brigadă*
battalion	*Lieutenant Colonel*	*Alezredes*	*Locotenent colonel*
company battery squadron	*Captain Major*	*Százados Őrnagy*	*Căpitan Maior*
platoon/troop	*First Lieutenant Second Lieutenant Lieutenant*	*Főhadnagy Hadnagy*	*Locotenent*
squad/section	*Staff Sergeant Sergeant Corporal*	*Főtörzsőrmester Törzsőrmester Szakaszvezető*	*Sergent*
fire team	*Corporal Lance Corporal*	*Szakaszvezető Tizedes*	*Caporal*

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13 http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/chain-of-command.html – accessed on 12 September 2018.

14 https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rendfokozat – accessed on: 6 June 2018; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_(military) – accessed on: 6 June 2018.

The English transcript/subtitle contains 37 occurrences of *private* (pvt.) and 24 occurrences of *soldier*, all of which were translated correctly. The term of *non-commissioned officer* is also interpreted correctly:

8) *noncommissioned officer* (*noncom, non-com,* NCO) [12]

    Hu. *tiszthelyettes*, *altiszt*

    Ro. *subofițer*

While *corporal* (CPL) is rather rare (only 2 instances found), *sergeant* is very frequent, constituting almost 12% of all terms, without causing headache when translated:

9) *sergeant*, *sarge*, *Sgt.* [113]

    Hu. *törzsőrmester*, *őrmester*, *Uram!* 'Sir!', *törzs* (abbrev.), *szakszi* (abbrev. + slang)

    Ro. *sergent*, *sergent de pluton*, *sergent major*, *sergent de companie*, *dle sergent*, *serg* (abbrev.)

As for the officers, *Lieutenant, Lt.* (82) is the most used rank, *Captain* (*Capt.*) is the second most frequent (53), and then *Colonel* (*Col.*) has 39 instances, followed by *Major, Maj.* (21) and *General, Gen.* (17). All of them were translated correctly, which signals that this category is probably among the most popular military terms (cf. the abundance of documentaries, science-fiction movies, and TV series), but two terms should be discussed separately:

10) *lieutenant colonel* (S1E10, 54:38) [1]

    Hu. *vezérezredes* 'General'

    Ro. *locotenent-colonel*

The example shows that Indo-European terminology is much different from Finno-Ugric, and the Hungarian subtitler offered a term that is 4 ranks higher in military hierarchy (cf. that a lieutenant colonel is in charge of a battalion, 300–800 people, paygrade O-5, while a general is in charge of a field army of 100,000–300,000 people, paygrade O-10).[15] Even if the majority of viewers would not be bothered, this is troubling for connoisseurs.

11) *Looey* (S1E8, 14:21) [1]

    Hu. *seb* 'wound'

    Ro. –

The term is a US military slang, and it refers to the rank of *lieutenant*.[16] While the Romanian subtitler skips the translation of the entire sentence, the Hungarian subtitler completely misinterprets the term.

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15   https://www.federalpay.org/military/army/ranks – accessed on: 12 September 2018; O-5 means $64,012–108,752 per year ($9,062 per month the most), while O-10 is $15,583 per month on average, although pay grades for 2019 list higher values for both categories; available at: https://www.militaryrates.com/military-pay-charts – accessed on: 12 September 2018.

16   https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/looey – accessed on: 8 June 2018.

Last but not least, we have collected terms of officers who are commanders "in charge": we have in mind terms like *Captain*, *Commanding* (i.e. commander of a company) or *commander*, *ranking officer*, *mess officer*, *supply officer*, and *senior* (i.e. next in rank), which presented no difficulty to find proper terms for them in Hungarian or Romanian.

3. Conclusions

After skimming through part of the military terminology present in *Band of Brothers*, we refrain from offering long-range conclusions, but the Hungarian and Romanian military terminology may be improved, especially when slang (*Looey*), abbreviation (*sarge*), acronym (*CP*, *HQ*, *OP*), or a culture-bound term is involved. The proper translation of these terms signals the expertise of the translator or subtitler.

We are aware that the most developed military terminology belongs to those nations and languages that are in the position of creating those terms (the USA, the Russian Federation, China, India, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, or France), yet there are many high-quality resources available online to create a powerful bilingual term base for other languages as well.

Military terminology connected to army equipment, ranks, and commanders are to be found in the press, the media, or the entertainment industry, without forgetting valuable sources such as dictionaries, glossaries, or experts in the field.

The possible mind map we drafted not only mirrors our categorization of terms to facilitate the presentation, but it also describes an internal logic of the army: it is well-sectioned for practical reasons, and each unit must be functional with proper equipment, ranking officers, who – following the chain of command – give various commands following specific tactics, and they also evaluate their commands (cf. rewards or punishments). The low frequency of insubordination signals the efficiency of this internal military culture, but this is already the topic of a possible further article.

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