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How to deal with meaning ambiguity in international classifications on disability in five different languages

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Abstract From ICIDH to ICF, knowledge on disability has evolved and the wording has changed in the different languages without a clear relation with Ontology. The authors compare the different meanings of the same word disability, in five languages, across standard classifications and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and propose an ontology perspective. One of us has proposed to use an acronym to overcome the linguistic barrier with the translation in national languages. The discussion is open to consider the risk not to face the use of the same English terms without referring to a semantic definition before translation.

Introduction

Table 1 - The table shows the results of the semantic comparison

From the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, Handicaps (ICIDH, WHO, 1980) to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF, WHO, 2001), knowledge on disability has evolved and the wording has changed in the different languages without a clear relation with Ontology. The authors compare the different meanings of the same word disability across standard classifications and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and propose an ontology perspective.

Methods & Materials

Three different meanings of the same

Language	ICIDH	ICF	UNCRPD
English	Disability	Disability	Disability
French	Incapacité	Handicap	Handicap
Italian	Disabilità	Disabilità	Disabilità
Portuguese	Incapacidade	Incapacidade	Deficiência
Spanish (Castillano)	Discapacidad	Discapacidad	Discapacidad
Unique Semantic Identifier (USI)	USI 01 The inability to perform an activity in a normal manner due to an impairment.	USI 02 An umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. It denotes the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual and that individual's contextual factors.	USI 03 who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interactionmay hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

allows us to outline the concept of

Conclusions

English term disability in three different standard terminologies were analysed (ICIDH, ICF, UNCRPD) then the translation of these three different meanings in five languages were considered.

Results

ICIDH Disability is defined as: The inability to perform an activity in a normal manner due to an impairment. **ICF Disability** is defined as: "An umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. It denotes the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual and that individual's contextual factors". In the same classification, WHO provides a definition for Functioning, in such a way specular, used for describing the positive interaction between an individual and that individual's contextual factors.

disability, which, without questioning the physical/mental impairment (seen as a precondition), focuses on the consequences that people with disabilities face in their daily life because of the presence of barriers. The consequences, according to the UN definition, are negative and they regard the restriction to participation in life. Thus, the definition of the UN, although it does not explicitly define what disability is, suggests that disability is the negative consequence of an interaction between a person with impairments and the environment. On the other hand, the issue about what is a positive interaction and what is a negative one is not faced in the " ICF red book". The schema suggested in Annex 2 (ICF, pag. 223) is not sufficient to solve the problem on how

The different national languages addresses the change in meaning differently making comparisons of words misleading.

One of us [1] has proposed to use an acronym to overcome the linguistic barrier with the translation in national languages. In the era of Ontology an alternative proposal may be to associate to the words (e.g Disability) in each language a Unique Semantic Identifier (USI) which explicits the definition of the word allowing not to confuse it with the same word with another meaning in another context. The discussion is open to consider the risk not to face the use of the same English terms without referring to a semantic definition before translation. The positive side of the disability coin is "functioning" and we need to identify it too in an appropriate ontological way.

On the other hand UNO has approved and defined a **UN CRPD which defines persons with Disabilities** as Persons "who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction ...may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". Such a definition

to distinguish positive from negative interactions.

Figure 2 – The "disability" cloud

normal to US individual's unbrella Network individual's individual's

References

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