Article

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Translating the principles of good governance: in search of *accountability* in Spanish and German

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Abstract: Good governance is a key factor in underpinning the integrity and efficiency of an institution, whether it is a private company or a national or international organisation. The core principles of good governance are now often defined as *fairness*, *accountability*, *responsibility* and *transparency*. Although these terms are familiar to all those involved in corporate social responsibility/sustainability and business ethics, and are frequently discussed in the European Parliament and European directives, they often pose a challenge to the translator, since obvious equivalents for all of them do not exist in all EU languages. In this paper, I take the example of *accountability*, and examine the way that it is represented in both Spanish and German in the EUROPARL7 parallel corpus of European Parliament Proceedings, available in the Sketch Engine corpus platform. *Accountability* in English can be defined as an assurance that individuals or organizations will be evaluated on their performance or behaviour related to something for which they are responsible, or more simply, as being responsible for explaining what you do and able to give a satisfactory account of it to those whom your actions affect. The English term *accountability* thus differs from *responsibility* and *transparency*, although it overlaps with both. However, not all languages allow us to distinguish easily between the concepts they designate. In fact, the majority of Spanish translations of *accountability* found in EUROPARL7 simply use *responsabilidad*, while others make reference to *rendir cuentas* or *rendición de cuentas*, and a few actually use *transparencia*. In German, the picture is less confused, with the closer term *Rechenschaftspflicht* employed as the usual translation, but an abundance of alternatives such as *Verantwortlichkeit* and *Auskunftspflicht* also appear. In my conclusions, I discuss the rationale that may

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underlie the different choices, point to problems that might arise from poor translations, and suggest reasons we should strive to maintain clear definitions of these key concepts.

Keywords: EU-law; European Parliament; good governance; legal translation; multilingual law

1 Introduction

Good governance is a key factor in underpinning the integrity and efficiency of an institution, whether it is a private company or a national or international organisation. The core principles of good governance are now often defined as “fairness”, “accountability”, “responsibility” and “transparency” (Cadbury 1992; Solomon 2004; Warren 2014). Although these terms are familiar to all those involved in corporate social responsibility and business ethics, and are frequently discussed in the European Parliament and European directives, they often pose a challenge to the translator, since obvious equivalents do not exist in all EU languages. In what follows, I will explore the problem surrounding “accountability”, and then present some ways in which it can be distinguished from its nearest synonyms.

1.1 In search of accountability

One of the terms that causes particular difficulty in this sense is “accountability”. This subject has been a matter of concern within the European Union itself, with a Eurogov paper dedicated explicitly to explaining what accountability is, what different kinds of “accountability” there are, and how it should be assessed (Bovens 2006: 5). In this document, “accountability” is described as a “golden concept” that no one can be against because it conveys an image of transparency and trustworthiness. However, the same author also points out that it is an “elusive” concept that means different things to different people. One of the problems that arises is that the terms *accountable* and *accountability* have distanced themselves somewhat from their etymological origins, which relate to the notion of “accounts” and “counting” in early bookkeeping practices, and have acquired new meanings associated with Anglo-American business culture. However, Dubnick (2005: 379) points out that increasing use of the terms *accountable* and *accountability* has led to some degree of confusion about what they really mean. He emphasises that the core idea of “giving accounts” can help us to distinguish them from near-synonyms, and identifies a particularly frequent

confusion of *accountability* with *responsibility*. Nonetheless, the term retains a rather elusive quality. Although “accountability” is obviously involved in the search for democracy or justice, it cannot be equated with achieving either of these (i.e., we demand that politicians should submit to an election or wrongdoers should stand trial in the name of accountability, but by winning or an election or standing trial one does not become “accountable”). To make this concept easier to understand, in practice it is frequently defined in a strategic way (i.e. accountable for what), or through the means by which someone is called to account for his/her actions (accountability procedures) (Dubnick 2005: 380). Yet neither of these approaches actually helps us to delimit the concept of “accountability” in a satisfactory way. Mulgan (2000) considers that this problem can be addressed by going back to the core notion of “giving accounts”. Giving accounts involves providing reliable, objective information in a neutral manner. This information should be fit for purpose, that is, this information has been requested with a particular end in mind, and the information should be complete and accurate. In this sense, the notion of “accountability” is still conceptually bound up with the financial world, where reports are supposed to be clear and accurate, taking the form of audits.

Nonetheless, even if the metaphor of “giving accounts” is useful to grasp the nature of “accountability”, it is clear that this term has freed itself somewhat from its original association with dull, repetitive bookkeeping and come to hold a wider promise of fairness and transparency (Bovens 2006: 6). Bovens argues that this shift to a broader notion of “public accountability” took place mainly in the English speaking world, in the context of political moves towards more open governance during the Thatcher and Clinton-Gore administrations, in which management styles and instruments used in private enterprise were introduced into the public sector in order to promote fair, efficient management (Politt and Bouckaert 2005). Although, as Bovens (2006) explains, various Northern EU countries were soon to follow this lead, the main bulk of EU countries with strong administrative law traditions found this approach less appealing, as it seemed not to fit so well into their paradigm of public administrative law as a self-regulating system with its own principles and jurisprudence. These differences in tradition mean that not only is the word itself hard to understand in many languages that lack equivalents, but the understanding of what it actually might mean in practice is also challenging. This situation is sometimes confused still further by the fact that “accountability” seems to have taken on a vague iconic quality in certain countries: Bovens (2006: 8) observes that in the USA it seems to have acquired an evaluative meaning of “good governance” or “virtuous behaviour” in general, covering a wide variety of different attributes. For this reason, without rejecting the notion of “giving accounts”, Bovens (2006: 9) comes to the conclusion that “accountability” is properly understood as “the obligation to explain and justify

conduct”, which implies a relationship between the person who provides that account and the person/people to whom it is given. “Accountability” thus has two parties: the “actor” and the “forum”, in which “the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences”. In the case of political accountability, for example, the politician has an obligation to explain and justify his/her conduct to the electorate, because he/she has been elected to represent them. In Warren’s words (2014: 3), “accountability” supports democracy “by connecting those entitled to influence collective decisions by virtue of their real or potential affectedness to agents who make and organize these decisions on their behalf”. In the case of corporations, on the other hand, the company’s management is primarily accountable to the shareholders, although there is an emergent understanding that it is also accountable to a broader group of stakeholders or even to society as a whole (Solomon 2004: 14).

1.2 Accountability, transparency and responsibility

At this point, it is useful to consider how accountability differs from its near-synonyms “transparency” and “responsibility”. In the case of “transparency”, the difference is relatively easy to grasp. As Bovens (2006: 13) explains, transparency only reflects the element of “publicness” in public accountability, that is, public access to documents, data, etc., so it would theoretically be possible to make data public without holding anyone to account for them. In other words, transparency (publicness) in itself does not involve the dimension of responsibility, whereas accountability does. The difference between “accountability” and “responsibility” is perhaps more complicated, because the two notions seem to have a substantial area of overlap. In “responsibility”, the core idea seems to be that of duty. Bivins (2006: 20) offers the definition “bundle of obligations associated with a job or function”, and goes on to say that “a responsible actor may be seen as one whose job involves a predetermined set of obligations that must be met in order for the job to be accomplished.” However, it is clear that responsibility also extends to include moral obligations that are related to the functional obligations of the role in question. This obviously brings us close to the field of accountability, because if someone is responsible for performing a role, surely that person can also be held accountable if it is not done properly? Nonetheless, Bivins (2006: 21) considers that the concepts of “responsibility” and “accountability” should not be conflated, since responsibility is associated with autonomous moral agents acting as they think best, while accountability always implies that someone is held to account by someone else. In the context of social governance, this relational distinction is

crucial: those who serve the people or the community should be accountable to the people or the community. This is why the term “accountability” is peculiarly appropriate to describe what we expect of our political representatives in a parliamentary democracy, our civil servants, and the bodies within our national and supranational institutions (cf. Bovens 2006). Bovens distinguishes five different types of public accountability: political, legal, administrative, professional and social. In institutions such as the European Union, accountability is a paramount concern, and is written into the descriptions of different positions and bodies from the president downwards. For example, a recent EU briefing begins with the words:

Transparency, integrity, and accountability are the essential prerequisites of a democracy based on the rule of law (European Parliament 2019).

It goes on to explain that:

Transparency requires the disclosure of information on policy-making and spending, while ensuring citizens’ access to such information. It is therefore a key element to build accountability of and trust in decision-makers. In this respect, monitoring and oversight are necessary tools to guarantee the accountability of public institutions, whilst participatory approaches involve civil societies in this process. The notion of integrity of public institutions implies the use of their powers for officially authorised and publicly justified purposes. This holds true for the European Union as well, where these intertwined principles are at the core of the relations between its institutions and citizens (European Parliament 2019).

This declaration fully operationalises the relational definition of “accountability” by establishing citizens and civil society as the beneficiaries and proposing the dyadic formulation “to build accountability of and trust in decision-makers”. Public institutions, in this understanding, should practise accountability in the sense that their actions should be disclosed to the public and they should be held responsible for these actions. If this happens, then the public will be able to build trust in these institutions and the way they use the powers that they have been given.

2 Accountability in translation

Given the importance of the concept of accountability in current conceptualisations of public life, it is striking that many other EU languages have so far developed no exact equivalent. If we start with dictionary definitions, Spanish dictionaries generally offer *responsabilidad* (Cambridge Online English-Spanish Dictionary, Collins Online English-Spanish Dictionary, Oxford Online English-Spanish Dictionary), and explanations provided are often accompanied by notes

such as “there is no precise translation into Spanish”. Another more promising option is *rendición de cuentas* (giving accounts) (Wordreference Online Dictionary), or even *rendición de cuentas democrática* (giving democratic accounts). In fact, the Spanish-language entry equivalent to “Accountability” in Wikipedia is headed “Rendición de cuentas”, and provides the (rather flawed) explanation that “discussion of this subject originated in English-speaking countries and therefore there is no exact translation for the original concept” (Wikipedia 2020). The translators’ online resource from Trusted Translations (2015) gives *obligación de rendir cuentas*, as distinct from *responsibility*, which is the “obligation towards all the people who depend on one’s professional work”, and this is clarified by a blog entry explaining the difference in lay terms, which reaches the conclusion that use of the Spanish word *responsable* might cause confusion, but fails to provide a solution to the problem of how to translate *accountable*. So the question arises, how do translators in languages that lack a satisfactory synonym try to convey this idea in official translations? In what follows, I offer an empirical approach to the translation of *accountable* and *accountability* into Spanish and German in EU contexts, by reviewing the translations in the parallel EUROPARL7 database. Since texts from the European Parliament are translated into and from relay languages, particularly English, into other target languages (European Parliament Translation 2020), this offers a suitably large corpus for exploring how translators deal with this challenging term in different target languages.

3 Empirical investigation

A corpus-based approach was adopted on the grounds that this would make it possible to obtain a large number of instances in which the same terms had been translated into the target languages. This has the advantage of providing a very comprehensive view of the way translators handle a particular word or words across a vast amount of data. Like other computational approaches, this may lead to some loss of contextual information, since the researcher generally only accesses the section or paragraph of text in question. However, this is usually enough to establish the pragmatic function of the word and its relationship to the co-text, and in cases of doubt, further sections of text can easily be accessed.

First, the terms *accountable* and *accountability* were located in the parallel English-Spanish and English-German EUROPARL7 corpora of European Parliament Proceedings, available in the Sketch Engine corpus platform. The concordance lines were then scanned to identify the principal candidates in the target language, and these were quantified by searches across the parallel corpora. Instances in which each of the main candidates were found were then analysed in

detail in order to establish patterns that might determine the use of a specific option. Examples were selected to illustrate typical uses of the main options found, and the contexts of the different terms were analysed. In what follows I look first at the Spanish data, and subsequently at the German data. I then briefly explore the potential of studying the lexical environment as an alternative way of testing how close the most frequently chosen near synonyms (*responsable* and *rechen-schaftspflichtig*) are to the English terms in this corpus.

4 Representing *accountable* and *accountability* in Spanish

The EUROPARL7 English-Spanish corpus offers 782 instances of “accountable” in English, and 1,279 of “accountability”. In what follows, I provide an overview of the main terms used to translate “accountable” and “accountability” into Spanish in this corpus, and examine some examples that shed light on the problem, the possible solutions, and the potential failures.

4.1 *Accountable* in Spanish

I will now review these options in order of frequency of occurrence. The main translations found in the parallel corpus are represented in order of frequency in Graph 1. By far the most common translation is *responsable* (responsible) (339), which is also an adjective and therefore offers a convenient solution for the translator.

Graph 1: Most frequent translations of *accountable* in EUROPARL7 English-Spanish corpus.

Bearing in mind the essentially relational nature of the term *accountable* analysed above, this option works quite well, because it includes the institution to which the actor is to be held responsible, through the formulation *responsable ante*, that is, *accountable to*:

Our main objective was, and is, to have a small, functional Board which, through the balance of its membership, can be seen to be independent, yet accountable to the Community institutions.

*Nuestro objetivo principal era -y es- el de que sea una Junta pequeña, funcional, que, mediante el equilibrio de su composición, pueda ser reconocida como independiente y, aun así, responsable ante las instituciones comunitarias.*¹

However, this option is arguably less successful where no forum is specified:

The global fund represents a bold new approach – fast-moving, participatory and accountable.

El fondo mundial representa un nuevo enfoque audaz, de movimiento rápido, participativo y responsable.

In instances such as this, the translation *responsable* inevitably suggests the meaning of autonomous moral agents acting as they think fit (see above), and the core relational concept of accountability is lost.

Other possibilities that appear more successful in conveying the full meaning of *accountable* because they allow specification of the forum are those formed with various verbs (*rendir*, *dar*, *pedir*) plus *cuentas* (202) plus *a* or *ante*, as in the following example:

We are accountable to European citizens, who are ever more doubtful of the existence of a European social model.

Debemos rendir cuentas a los ciudadanos europeos, que dudan cada vez más de la existencia de un modelo social europeo.

A further possibility that specifies the forum is *responder ante* (44):

The EU did not manage to stop the catastrophe in the Balkans in time, and we shall forever be accountable to our children for this failure.

La UE no fue capaz de detener a tiempo la catástrofe en los Balcanes y tendremos que responder ante nuestros hijos por esta incapacidad.

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¹ The „foreign“ language is italicized for the sake of visual separation.

In some cases, as the original is rather general in its meaning and does not specify any forum other than the general public, the use of phrases such as *exigir responsabilidades* (35) appears acceptable:

Others, such as the management at Sellafield, who deliberately conceal information and involve themselves in bad practices, be held accountable for their deeds.

A otros, como los directivos de Sellafield, que ocultan información deliberadamente y que están implicados en malas prácticas, se les exigirá responsabilidades por sus hechos.

However, the translations in which *responsabilidad* or *responsabilidades* is used without a forum are also liable to inaccuracy. In the example that follows, the British people are calling for accountability, in the sense of openness and the willingness to explain and justify what is happening, rather than more “responsibility” in the sense of moral agents taking decisions in line with their own conscience:

British people want reform of the EU to make it more accountable and more efficient.

El pueblo británico desea una reforma de la UE que incremente la responsabilidad y la eficiencia.

Although, as Graph 1 shows, most of the translations into Spanish use some form of the root *responder* (*responsable*, *responsabilidad*, *responsabilidades*) or an expression including *cuenta/s* (account/s), a few of the translations diverged from this norm. Among the other rare translations are *culpable* (guilty):

You will soon have been in office for a year, so we have to observe that you too will be accountable if you fail to meet your responsibilities.

Pronto habréis cumplido un año en vuestros puestos, por lo que habremos de constatar que también sois culpables si traicionáis vuestra responsabilidad.

As well as *contrastable* (verifiable):

The proposed change will make the systems more effective, both in terms of inputs and in terms of measured and accountable outcomes.

El cambio propuesto los hará más efectivos tanto en términos de insumos como en términos de resultados mensurables y contrastables.

And even *transparente* (transparent):

We underline that we want to help reform the multilateral organisations, making them more open, more accountable and more democratic.

Hacemos hincapié en que queremos contribuir a la reforma de las organizaciones multilaterales, hacerlas más abiertas, más transparentes y más democráticas.

These undertakings must be realistic, fair and accountable.

Esos compromisos deben ser realistas, justos y transparentes.

However, it is noticeable that *accountable* is often used in the same phrase as *transparent*, which rules this out as a translation. *Accountable* occurs in the same phrase as *transparent* in 73 cases, and as *transparency* in 23. Where both terms appear, *responsable* is the usual translation found in the list of qualities:

I am sure if they join the Union, they will wish to ensure transparency and accountability in all the institutions.

Estoy seguro de que si entran en la Unión querrán asegurar que todas las instituciones sean transparentes y responsables.

Two other strategies for dealing with this problem also appear in this parallel corpus, namely omission, or *ad hoc* paraphrase. Paraphrases include use of the verb *juzgar* ('to try'):

[...] will be held accountable before internationally united political opinion.

[...] *será juzgado por una opinión internacional políticamente unánime.*

Or the notion of *descontrol* ('lack of control') presented as the opposite of accountability:

In other words, even less accountable capital transactions and even fewer legislative specifications.

En pocas palabras, un mayor descontrol en la acción del capital, una mayor limitación de los requisitos legislativos.

Once, the translation is just rendered as *democrático* ('democratic'):

Is it transparent and accountable?

¿Es transparente y democrática?

Finally, in some cases the translator simply fails to provide any term equivalent to *accountable*. The strategy of omission is clearly not productive, and the following example is interesting in this sense, as it omits the second coordinate clause altogether:

[...] an administration in which officials are provided with the means to carry out their tasks and are held fully accountable at all levels.

[...] una administración en la que los funcionarios dispongan de los medios para ejecutar sus tareas.

4.2 Accountability in Spanish

Graph 2 shows the most frequent translations of *accountability* found in the parallel corpus, where the term is found 1,279 times. If we compare these data with Graph 1, it is clear that the near-synonym *responsabilidad* (‘responsibility’) predominates when translating the noun, and formulations involving *rendir cuentas*, such as the nominalization *rendición de cuentas*, reach a much lower frequency than was the case with translations of the adjectival form.

As mentioned above, the usual Spanish translation found, *responsabilidad*, entails a degree of vagueness when the forum is not specified. In contrast to the examples with *accountable*, however, which often approximate to the original English meaning when the forum is named, the instances with *accountability* rarely name the forum explicitly. Thus we find many mentions of *accountability* as a desirable quality, almost all of which are translated as *responsabilidad*:

greater accountability and more democracy

mayor exigencia de responsabilidad y más democracia

Graph 2: Most frequent translations of *accountability* in EUROPARL7 English-Spanish corpus.

public accountability and transparency

transparencia y responsabilidad públicas

the sense of accountability shown by all the participants

el sentido de la responsabilidad de todos los participantes

In the rare instances when the forum is specified, the Spanish translations offer a variety of prepositions to indicate the relationship, including *hacia*, *de cara a* and *para con*:

accountability towards the public

su responsabilidad de cara al público

Roll call votes increase MEPs' accountability towards citizens.

Las votaciones nominales aumentan la responsabilidad de los eurodiputados para con los ciudadanos.

One striking feature of Graph 2 is the number of instances in which the blatantly inaccurate translations *contable* (6) and *contabilidad* (4) are provided. *Contabilidad* means “accountancy” or “bookkeeping” in the literal sense, and so the translations shown here are clearly inappropriate, missing the essential point about the need to explain one’s activities to the forum of stakeholders:

This is about accountability and the proper functioning of democracy.

Son cuestiones de contabilidad y del correcto funcionamiento de la democracia.

Nor is there any point in creating an isolated island within the institution, which would go against the whole principle of accountability.

Tampoco existe razón alguna para crear una zona aislada en una institución, puesto que iría en contra de todo el principio de contabilidad.

This system is therefore in line with accountability to the budgetary authority.

Este sistema se encuentra por tanto en armonía con la contabilidad para las autoridades presupuestarias.

Financial accountability has to be clarified.

Habrà que aclarar la contabilidad financiera.

Finally, one type of paraphrase that is occasionally found in the Spanish corpus involves the use of antonyms:

They use the independence and lack of institutional accountability they enjoy as a shield for what are, in fact, political actions.

Dichos magistrados se escudan en la independencia y en la irresponsabilidad institucional que disfrutaban y, de hecho, desarrollan acciones políticas.

Finally, while the adjective *accountable* was never used simply as a direct loan in the Spanish text, the noun *accountability* was found 6 times in the Spanish translation, once with a gloss (“what in English is known as democratic accountability”):

This process should, of course, take place with full respect for democratic accountability.

Este proceso debe realizarse, como es lógico, respetando la responsabilidad democrática, lo que en inglés se denomina la democratic accountability.

But usually no such explanation is provided, which suggests that the translator, at least, takes the audience’s understanding of this foreign term for granted:

The other institutions are more focused on accountability and cost management.

Las demás instituciones se han enfocado más en la accountability y el control del gasto.

5 Representing *accountable* and *accountability* in German

5.1 *Accountable* in German

Accountable in English occurs 778 times in the EUROPARL7 English-German parallel corpus. The most frequent terms used in the German translations are shown in Graph 3.

By far the most frequent way of representing *accountable* is by using a word that includes the element *Rechenschaft* (‘account, reckoning, accountability’), familiar from expressions such as *zur Rechenschaft ziehen* (‘to call to account’), which appears to preserve the bookkeeping metaphor that underlies the origins of the concept of “accountability”. The most popular option is either the adjective *rechenschaftspflichtig* (190) (‘accountable, liable to account’), or an expression

Graph 3: Most frequent translations of *accountable* in EUROPARL7 English-German corpus.

combining the noun *Rechenschaft* (152) with a verb, to paraphrase the adjective phrase. The following example illustrates a literal translation using *rechenschaftspflichtig*, in which the parts of speech used are the same, and the forum (a democratic institution) is indicated using *to/gegenüber*.

In human resources policy, the involvement of Parliament will unavoidably have to be as an employer of civil servants as well as a democratic institution to which the Commission is accountable.

In der Personalpolitik besteht die Aufgabe des Parlaments eindeutig darin, sowohl als Arbeitgeber von Beamten als auch als demokratische Institution zu fungieren, gegenüber welcher die Kommission rechenschaftspflichtig ist.

However, a large number of the German translations use the noun *Rechenschaft* (152), which requires a verb in order to convey the meaning, thus opening the scope for explanation. It could be that this facilitates the naming of the forum, which can be provided in the dative case. The following example illustrates how this can work in German to convey exactly the same elements of meaning:

[...] but it also has to be accountable to European citizens through our Parliament.

[...] gleichzeitig ist sie den europäischen Bürgern über unser Parlament zur Rechenschaft verpflichtet.

Another frequent noun used to translate *accountable* is *Verantwortung* (129), meaning *responsibility*. As was the case with the Spanish *responsabilidad*, this word is more polysemous and therefore somewhat less exact. This option tends to be used when the forum is not explicitly named.

Others, such as the management at Sellafield, who deliberately conceal information and involve themselves in bad practices, be held accountable for their deeds.

Andere, wie das Management von Sellafield, die bewusst Informationen vorenthalten und in schlechte Praktiken verwickelt sind, werden für ihr Tun zur Verantwortung gezogen.

However, we also find instances in which the speaker uses both terms (*accountable* and *responsible*), which calls on the translator to represent the distinction between the two, as in the following example:

[This] is what I call responsibility, and I must also be accountable to the people.

[Das] nenne ich Verantwortung. Andererseits bin ich dem Bürger gegenüber rechenschaftspflichtig.

Where the forum is named (only twice), the preposition is “gegenüber”:

We will be accountable to thousands of families.

Wir werden gegenüber Tausenden von Familien die Verantwortung dafür tragen müssen.

[...] we are all, of course, accountable at home – to consumers on the one hand and to milk producers on the other.

[...] dass wir alle auch daheim natürlich in der Verantwortung stehen – gegenüber den Verbrauchern auf der einen Seite und gegenüber den Milcherzeugern auf der anderen Seite.

Again, when the adjective *verantwortlich* (122) is used, we find greater grammatical parallelism, but lower exactitude. Compared with *rechenschaftspflichtig*, in the case of *verantwortlich* it appears more natural to include the forum (often with *gegenüber*):

We are politically and morally accountable to millions of the European electorate for our financial management of the Union.

Wir sind sowohl politisch als auch moralisch gegenüber Millionen von europäischen Wählerinnen und Wählern für das Finanzgebaren der Union verantwortlich.

The noun *Rechenschaftspflicht* (40) requires a verb (often *bestehen*, *unterliegen*, *ablegen*), but also allows incorporation of the forum:

Major European companies have to be accountable in how they operate in other parts of the world.

Große europäische Unternehmen unterliegen einer Rechenschaftspflicht über ihre Geschäftstätigkeit in anderen Teilen der Welt.

We consider it important that all these independent agencies should be accountable to Parliament.

Was schließlich die Rechenschaftspflicht betrifft, so sollten unserer Meinung nach alle unabhängigen Agenturen gegenüber dem Parlament Rechenschaft ablegen.

As we observed above, some of the most challenging translations are those in which a list of qualities appears, where a degree of interpretation is sometimes required:

I am committed to the Commission being open, effective and accountable.

Ich stehe für eine Kommission, die offen und effizient ist und der Rechenschaftspflicht unterliegt.

The verb *verantworten* (12) is found in the verbal construction *haben zu verantworten* (similar to the English expression *to have to answer for*), and the root *Verantwortung* also gives rise to a couple of unusual options, such as *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* (2) or *verantwortungsbewusst* (11). Other nouns, such as *Verantwortlichkeit* ('responsible-ness') (14) or the composite *Einzelverantwortung* (1) ('individual responsibility') provide other strategies for conveying the same idea:

[...] while the individual commissioners must be held accountable.

[...] für die Kommissionsmitglieder das Prinzip der Einzelverantwortung gilt.

Very occasionally, the German text also uses the base root *antworten* ('to answer') (3) or expressions such as *Rede und Antwort stehen* ('to stand to account for').

One of the more interesting choices found in the German corpus was *demokratische Kontrolle* (*unterziehen, unterstehen*) ('to subject to or to be subject to democratic control') (25), which stresses the aspect of openness to a forum. This contrasts with the Spanish translations, which sometimes use words related to the root *control*, but where the extension *democratic* is not found. In the following example, we see that the translator is elaborating *accountable* in the context of European expansion:

It must be more accountable and more transparent, especially as we approach enlargement.

Sie muss – insbesondere angesichts der bevorstehenden Erweiterung – stärker demokratischer Kontrolle unterliegen und transparenter werden.

Two interesting options that can be mentioned here are those based on the adjective *haftbar* ('liable') (8) or related noun *Haftung* (8) ('liability'), with clear legal connotations:

At the present time, the owner of the potentially polluting products is not held accountable for the pollution.

Heutzutage wird der Eigentümer der potentiell verschmutzenden Produkte nicht für die Verschmutzung haftbar gemacht.

We also find the similarly legal/judicial notion of ‘guilt’ (*schuldig*) (13):

You will soon have been in office for a year, so we have to observe that you too will be accountable if you fail to meet your responsibilities.

Sie sind jetzt bald ein Jahr lang im Amt und wir müssen feststellen, dass Sie auch schuldig werden, wenn Sie Ihre Verantwortung nicht wahrnehmen.

Lastly, we find the wealth of German vocabulary brought to bear on the problem of *accountable*, giving rise to a plethora of near synonyms or paraphrases:

[...] to make Bush accountable for his actions.

[...] dieser zügellosen Politik von Präsident Bush Einhaltung zu gebieten.

We, the Members of the European Parliament, are accountable.

Wir als Parlament haben ja Bilanz zu ziehen.

[...] a more accountable decision-making process.

[...] ein übersichtlicherer Entscheidungsfindungsprozess.

transparent and accountable

transparent und kontrollierbar

[...] but maintain an accountable market value.

[...] sondern einen nachvollziehbaren Marktwert erhalten.

by firm and accountable commitments

mit festen und nachprüfbaren Verpflichtungen

In other words, even less accountable capital transactions and even fewer legislative specifications.

Kurzum: Das Kapital darf noch hemmungsloser schalten und walten und die Rechtsvorschriften werden weiter eingeschränkt.

[...] stand accountable to his or her voters.

[...] für den wir gegenüber unseren Wählern geradestehen müssen.

5.2 Accountability in German

As for *accountability*, this noun occurs 1,232 times in the EUROPARL7 English-German parallel corpus. The main translations used to convey this term in German are shown below in Graph 4.

The translation of the noun *accountability* evidently poses fewer problems than that of the adjective, with *Rechenschaftspflicht* (572) being used in the vast majority of instances. The other terms used to some degree were *Verantwortlichkeit* (139), (*demokratische, justizielle, rechtliche*, etc.) *Kontrolle* (74), *Verantwortung* (69) and *Rechenschaft* (50). Beyond that, we find elaborations of *Verantwortung*, such as *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* (16) or *Verantwortungsgefühl* (6), and a range of terms that draw on the accounting/reporting metaphor, such as *Berichterstattung* (8) and *Auskunftspflicht* (6). The notion of democratic obligations also reappears here, but translators make use of the term *Demokratisierung* (democratisation), as in the example “the lack of democratic accountability of the IMF”, which is represented as *zur fehlenden Demokratisierung des IWF*.

Interestingly, in one case the German text actually uses the English original term *accountable*, but in such a way that it is not simply quoted in the text (*without ... accountability becomes unaccountable* in the German text):

Graph 4: Most frequent translations of “*accountability*” in EUROPARL7 English-German corpus.

Item 13 makes it very clear that Euratom functions undemocratically, without either transparency or accountability.

Undemokratisch, intransparent und unaccountable arbeitet Euratom – das wird in Ziffer 13 auch sehr deutlich zum Ausdruck gebracht.

One noticeable difference between the German and the Spanish translators is that the Germans seem more inclined than their Spanish counterparts to use the English term *accountability* as a direct loan, with 16 instances in this corpus:

I would now like to make a few observations on another important issue that has arisen, that of the accountability of the European Central Bank.

Ich möchte nun zu einem weiteren wichtigen Thema, nämlich der accountability der Europäischen Zentralbank, einige Betrachtungen anstellen.

This is only once glossed (“What one in English would describe as democratic accountability”):

This process should, of course, take place with full respect for democratic accountability.

Folgerichtig muss sich dieser Prozess unter Beachtung der demokratischen Rechenschaftspflicht vollziehen, was man auf Englisch als ‚democratic accountability‘ bezeichnen würde.

Regarding misleading translations, there are a very few instances in which *accountability* is misrepresented as *bookkeeping*, as was also occasionally the case in the Spanish corpus. In the following example, “double accountability” is translated as “*doppelte Buchführung*” (‘double-entry bookkeeping’), which is not appropriate:

It is something we have already looked at and last year we decided that we did not want to have that double accountability.

Wir haben uns hiermit bereits befasst und im letzten Jahr beschlossen, dass wir diese doppelte Buchführung nicht haben wollen.

6 Lexical environments of *accountable*, *responsable* and *rechenschaftspflichtig*

Classification of examples is not the only way of approaching the analysis of near synonyms. Previous authors have made creative use of corpus affordances to explore the extent to which lexical items overlap in terms of their immediate

context and therefore their field of usage. For example, Goźdź-Roszkowski (2013: 108) uses the collocational environment of near synonyms in order to “evoke a generic scenario in which a particular legal concept functions”, showing how collocations point to the domain- and genre-specificity of given terms. Applying a similar method here, we can see that *accountable*, in English in the EURO-PARL7 corpus, has the following “collocational environment”, or in other words, that this term has certain semantic preferences (Stubbs 2001). Table 1 shows the 10 most frequent collocates of *accountable* in the English EUROPARL7 corpus.

We can then compare the frequent collocates of *accountable* with those of *responsible* (Table 2) and *rechenschaftspflichtig* (Table 3), in order to obtain a new

Table 1: Ten most frequent collocates (± 3) (lemmas) of “accountable” in English corpus (LogDice).

Ten most frequent collocates (content words, number of co-occurrences)	Ten most frequent collocates (LogDice)
Hold 121	Servants 9.19
Transparent 57	Democratically 9.04
Parliament 42	Transparent 8.43
European 42	Held 7.79
Commission 34	Electorate 7.55
Democratically 32	Politically 7.27
Servant 29	Responsive 7.04
Citizen 23	Publicly 6.99
Government 22	Answerable 6.64
Democratic 21	Elected 6.61

Table 2: Most frequent collocates (± 3) of “responsible” in Spanish corpus.

Ten most frequent collocates (content words, number of co-occurrences)	Ten most frequent collocates (LogDice)
Políticos 467	Políticos 9
Comisario 405	Comisario 8.72
Autoridad 327	Quién 8.56
Comisión 316	Autoridad 8.17
Miembro 310	Toma 8.03
Estado 275	Principal 7.91
Política 237	Ante 7.57
Persona 233	Organismo 7.54
Principal 231	Pescar 7.52
Europeo 176	Ser 7.45

Table 3: Most frequent collocates (+3) of *rechenschaftspflichtig* in German corpus (**bold type** indicates terms with equivalents present in the other tables).

Ten most frequent collocates (content words, number of co-occurrences)	Ten most frequent collocates (LogDice)
Parlament 47	gegenüber 7.13
Öffentlichkeit 26	transparent 6.92
europäisch 24	
transparent 17	Öffentlichkeit 6.78
demokratisch 11	Wähler 6.34
national 8	Handlung 5.62
	gewählt 5.39
Wähler 7	Steuerzahler 5.29
Kommission 7	Organ 5.05
unabhängig 6	allgemein 4.74
Union 6	Minister 4.72

perspective on the potential similarity or difference between the ways these terms are used in this corpus.

It is clear from the proportion of words in bold type that Tables 1–3 bring to light greater overlap among the most frequent collocates of *accountable* and *rechenschaftspflichtig* than between these and those of *responsible*. We may note that the Spanish term is also much more frequent in the Spanish corpus than its equivalents are in the English and German corpora, suggesting that the Spanish word covers a range of meanings for which more exact terminology is used in the other two languages.

7 Discussion

This chapter started out from the observation that some English terms that have attained considerable prominence in the theory and practice of governance actually still pose a problem to translators working in other European languages. To understand why this is the case, and what the possible repercussions of this might be, it is useful to consider the adjoining/overlapping field of legal translation and the challenges facing translators in this area. As Biel and Engberg (2013: 3) point out, “legal translation, is an operation not only between two or more languages but, above all, between distinct legal systems and legal cultures”, and the terminology used is essentially system-bound. Although *accountable* and *accountability* cannot strictly speaking be classed as legal terms, they came to

prominence and took on a specific meaning in the field of corporate and institutional governance within a particular cultural sphere, namely developments in Anglo-American politics, administration and corporate organisation during the 1980s and 1990s which were not closely paralleled elsewhere. Given the essential similarity of the underlying problem, it is not unreasonable to suggest that terms like *accountable* are culturally embedded in a similar way to legal terms, and so the discussion that follows will draw mainly on the bibliography concerning legal translation.

In the parallel and overlapping field of legal translation, then, EU translators constantly face the lack of exact translation and mismatch between terms and concepts in different languages. According to Jopek Bosiacka (2013), in such contexts legal translators faced with difficulties of this kind adopt a number of strategies (see also Alcaraz Varó and Hughes 2002: 184–185). The first option is to find an exactly equivalent term, but as we have seen, this is not available in the present case in Spanish, and although German seems to offer a greater degree of equivalence with *rechenschaftspflichtig*, as shown, for example, through the overlap with *accountable* in its semantic preferences, it is striking from the above corpus study that no one-for-one term emerges clearly as a reliable default option. We must therefore move on to consider other classic possibilities available to the translator. A second possibility often encountered is the use of a literal equivalent that can be clarified by glosses if necessary. Although this seems to be a useful option, there is no evidence from the present study that translators here perceive this to be necessary, since hardly any of the translated texts in either language include a gloss. This is also close to the related strategy of “expansion”, that is, “adding an element to the translated item in the target language, where a literal translation would leave some doubt as to the actual scope of the lexical item in question” (Jopek-Bosiacka 2013: 120). However, the present study shows, if anything, that translators do not perceive the need to add any explanation indicating the differences between *accountability* and *responsibility*, and prefer the kind of very rough equivalence of *responsabilidad*. In a few cases, the translator here uses *susceptible de control* (‘controllable’ or ‘amenable to control’), which can be seen in the context as an attempt at explanation, although the German *demokratischer Kontrolle unterziehen* is more appropriate, since the notion of accountability is less about policing (‘control’) than about one’s duty to the stakeholders (*demokratische Kontrolle*).

A third possibility for representing problematic terms is described by Jopek-Bosiacka (2013: 120) as “transposition”, which involves the use of a different grammatical category while preserving the semantic value of the original. In the present case, the adjective *accountable* is sometimes transposed as a verb or verb-noun combination, as in the formulation *responder ante* (used meaning *be*

accountable to), which provides a more satisfactory solution as it reflects the notion of the responsibility of the actor to a forum. A slightly less optimum translation is *exigir responsabilidades*, which reflects the idea of “demanding that someone take the buck”, but leaves the forum implicit. In German, the transpositions with the noun *Rechenschaft* seem to be more accurate at conveying both the nature of the responsibility involved and the forum to whom this is owed. The greater flexibility of German, which allows many combinations of different root words with *Verantwortung* or *Rechenschaft* to fit a specific context, is a striking feature of this dataset.

In her contrastive analysis of translations of European Court of Justice judgments, Jopek-Bosiacka (2013: 127) concludes that ECJ lawyer-linguists mainly use functional equivalents, namely similar concepts if possible, sometimes with additional explanations. Her perception is that such explanations are often not sufficiently informative, and may even be misleading. She found that paraphrase/explanation was common with problematic terms referring to concepts embedded in Common Law culture, such as “consideration” or “misrepresentation”, which had no direct one-word equivalent in Polish legal terminology, but it was also quite common to find a near-equivalent used as though it were a synonym. Here, we can observe precisely the same phenomenon: Particularly in the Spanish translations, *responsable* and *responsabilidad* are used as the default translations, and the end-user’s attention is rarely drawn to the fact that the original word (*accountable* or *accountability*) actually has a complex and technical meaning above and beyond the realm of personal responsibility. The resulting lack of accuracy in the translated text means that all EU citizens do not truly have access to the original text in its fullest form, with the corresponding erosion of legal certainty and citizens’ rights. Of course, the history of language tells us that when true lacunae arise, language users are adept at importing terms from other languages or even coining completely new ones that fit the bill. In her study, Jopek-Bosiacka (2013) observed a tendency for Polish translators to import the English term where no equivalent was available. However, this phenomenon is so far scarcely perceptible in the parallel English-Spanish corpus, and only marginal in the English-German corpus studied here.

On a somewhat more mundane level, regarding the rationale underlying these different choices in practice, it is likely that the translators in the European Parliament are working under pressure. The default option of choosing a term related to responsibility comes easily to hand for the Spanish translators, while the German translators, who have more and better near synonyms at their disposal, make a greater effort to reflect the original idea in the specific context at hand. Since “accountability” is a key concept enshrined in the European Parliament’s guiding principles, more attention should be paid to understanding what it means.

If this leads to a greater use of the English loanword, as seems occasionally to be happening in German, then this at least shows awareness of the problem and an attempt to reflect the original as accurately as possible. At the same time, it would be advantageous for the Spanish translators, in particular, to strive harder to maintain a clear understanding of this key concept and the problems associated with its translation, and for professionals working in both target languages to be aware of the problems that might arise from misleading translations such as *bookkeeping* or *accountancy*. With this in mind, it is only possible to echo Jopek-Bosiacka's (2013: 128) conclusion that "translations of ECJ judgments must thus be treated as approximate and not fully equivalent", and state that the same trend is observable here. The consequences of this for the genuine unity of the European Union are far-reaching, not least because it is likely that the discrepancies that come to light in a study such as this one are probably only the tip of the iceberg. Clearly, more attention to detail is needed on the part of translators and drafters, which implies training and updating. But beyond this, it would also be useful for practical glossaries of problematic terms to be compiled and distributed, with a view to standardising the terminology used in each language and finding consensual solutions to problems – such as that caused by *accountable* – which require conceptual as well as linguistic expertise.

On a final note, it is interesting to speculate that when the European Union actually incorporates and operationalises a higher degree of accountability in its institutions and workings, the need for a term that reflects this concept accurately may eventually prompt the adoption of a loanword or some new coining that includes the key elements of responsible management, openness, and the duty to explain one's conduct in the appropriate forum of stakeholders. In the meantime, as this study has shown, there is a degree of vagueness about the way this notion is relayed across different European languages, which suggests that creating a "culture of accountability" is not currently a priority for the European Union or some of its Member States.

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