

TRANSLATING SPECIALIZED TEXTS ON LACTATION: LEXICAL CHALLENGES IN THE ENGLISH–POLISH LANGUAGE PAIR

The discourse surrounding breastfeeding and human lactation has undergone significant evolution in recent years, giving rise to new terminology that reflects shifting ethical, medical, and sociocultural paradigms. In English-speaking contexts, this development is closely tied to increasing awareness of inclusivity, bodily autonomy, and advances in human milk research [3, 4, 5]. Translating such discourse into Polish presents numerous lexical and cultural challenges, particularly in maintaining scientific accuracy while ensuring clarity and relevance for diverse audiences [2].

This study focuses on two translation contexts: peer-reviewed academic literature, such as articles from the *Journal of Human Lactation* and *Breastfeeding Medicine* [15], and popular-scientific materials designed for the public, including brochures, online content, and blog posts authored by lactation consultants and organizations [20].

This research adopts a qualitative, corpus-based approach. The analyzed corpus comprises 20 English-language academic articles and 20 popular-scientific texts on lactation published between 2020 and 2024, with a special focus on materials from 2024 and 2025 [5]. Translations into Polish—both published and unpublished—were examined to identify lexical patterns and translation strategies.

The study also incorporated terminology from official sources such as LactaPedia, the WHO, and the IBLCE glossary [23]. Analytical tools, including AntConc and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), were used to trace usage trends and lexical consistency.

The analysis draws on foundational theories in translation studies [11, 12] and terminology science [2], supported by insights from corpus and cognitive linguistics [1, 7]. Core concepts include *lexical equivalence and adequacy* [14, 21]; *register differences between scientific and popular discourse* [4]; *neologisms and terminological evolution* [17]; *sociocultural influences on terminological choices* [7]

Results and Analysis

Academic vs. Popular-Scientific Discourse

Academic texts on lactation often focus on biochemical and microbiological issues, such as the impact of heavy metals in human milk on infant gut microbiota. These texts are characterized by terminological density, formal syntax, and a neutral, non-emotive tone. Specialized terms such as *lactoferrin*, *exposome*, or *tricarboxylic acid cycle* are standard, as are verbs like *modulates*, *constitutes*, and *sequesters*—all of which require precise equivalents in Polish [3].

In contrast, popular-scientific texts adopt a more accessible style. While covering similar themes—such as the role of breastfeeding in microbiome development or disease prevention (e.g., asthma)—they simplify terminology and engage readers through metaphors and emotionally resonant language. For instance, one text likens breast milk to a “pacemaker” for the infant microbiome [20]. Terms like *bacterial flora* replace *gut microbiota*, while phrases like *milk came in* are used instead of *lactogenesis*.

Scientific Lexicon: Issues of Precision

Although standard terms such as *human milk*, *lactogenesis*, and *exclusive breastfeeding* are relatively established in English, their Polish equivalents often lack precision or consistency. Examples include:

- *Human milk* is translated as *kobiece mleko* (“woman’s milk”), which may contradict inclusivity efforts; *mleko ludzkie* (“human milk”) is more neutral and accurate.
- *Lactation insufficiency* rendered as *niewystarczająca laktacja* or *niedobór mleka*, with varying levels of clinical specificity [10, 13].

These inconsistencies emphasize the need for national glossaries and standardized terminology in Polish-language lactation texts.

Figurative Language in Popular-Scientific Texts

Popular texts often employ metaphors and colloquial expressions such as *nursing journey*, *boobie traps*, or *milk coming in*. These are frequently translated in ways that diminish their emotional or cultural meaning:

- The term “*milk coming in*” is translated as “*pojawienie się mleka*,” which fails to convey the gradual and physiological nature of the process [20].
- *Nursing journey* becomes *droga karmienia piersią*, which is semantically adequate but lacks the metaphorical resonance of the original [9, 13].

Gender-inclusive neologisms, such as *chestfeeding*, pose additional challenges. While some LGBTQ+ communities use the phrase *karmienie z klatki piersiowej*, no standardized Polish equivalent currently exists.

Inclusive Terminology and Sociolinguistic Shifts

Recent English-language materials increasingly favor inclusive and demedicalized terminology:

- *Lactating parent* instead of *breastfeeding mother*
- *Human milk feeding* in place of *breastfeeding* in clinical contexts

Polish translations are gradually adapting, although resistance persists due to cultural factors and the lack of institutional guidelines. This tension between innovation and tradition poses a significant challenge for translators working in health-related domains.

Translation Challenges

Academic translation requires a high degree of terminological accuracy and consistency. Translators must possess subject-matter knowledge and the ability to reflect complex syntactic and stylistic features of scientific writing.

Conversely, popular-scientific translation demands sensitivity to tone, metaphor, and reader engagement. Translators must creatively adapt figurative language and adjust register to match the cognitive expectations of the target audience.

Both genres highlight the need for tailored translation strategies and translator support tools, such as updated glossaries and access to domain-specific corpora, that reflect evolving discourses in lactation and inclusivity.

Discussion

The study reveals a notable gap between source and target languages in capturing the evolving discourse on lactation. Although scientific accuracy in academic texts can be preserved, emotional and cultural nuances in popular-scientific texts often remain underdeveloped. Translators must navigate between preserving innovation and ensuring comprehensibility and acceptability for Polish readers.

The lack of national standards for lactation terminology in Poland further complicates this task and underscores the need for institutional support [19, 21].

Conclusions

Translating specialized lactation texts from English into Polish reveals significant lexical and cultural challenges, particularly in terms of emerging and inclusive terminology. A systematic approach to terminology management, combined with efforts to promote inclusive language practices in Polish, is crucial for enhancing translation quality.

Future directions for research include developing a bilingual lactation terminology database and conducting reception studies to understand better how Polish-speaking audiences interpret translated content [5].

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