THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR TERMINOLOGY (EAFT)
OBJECTIVES AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Helmi Sonneveld, Topterm, Holland

The discipline of terminology has gained sig-
nificantly in importance in the past decades.
Yet there are still many problems that need to
be solved. Examples of the role of terminology
in the fields of documentation, information
management, standardisation, translation and
training are presented. The role, aims and
objectives of the newly established European
Association for Terminology (EAFT) are
described.

BACKGROUND

In 1995, the POINTER Project (the acronym stands for "Proposals
for an Operational Infrastructure for Terminology in Europe")
was performed by a Consortium of over 40 players who were co-
funded by the European Commission, DG XIII-E as part of its
Multilingual Action Plan (MLAP) programme. The aim of the work
was to produce a set of concrete recommendations for the
design, development, co-ordination and optimisation of a
comprehensive framework for terminology work in Europe. Par-
ticular attention was paid to the effective creation, dis-
tribution and exploitation of existing and future resources.

In the final report of the POINTER Project, published in
early 1996, the foundation of a European Association for
Terminology was recommended. Subsequently, the European Asso-
ciation for Terminology (EAFT) was founded in Kolding, Denmark
on 3 October, 1996, as a non-profit professional association
with the widest possible individual and corporate membership.

WHAT IS TERMINOLOGY?

Terminology is set of terms representing a system of concepts
of a particular subject field and the discipline dealing with
it. The modern age with its increasing specialisation on the
one hand and its more and more interdisciplinary aspects on the
other has created greater and greater problems in communi-
cation, and has thus increased the importance of terminology to

solve them. Also, the existence of numerous data banks of various kinds means that the use of good terminology is imperative if they are to function efficiently. Thus, the European Association for Terminology has been founded to help with the solution of all aspects associated with these communication problems.

Terminology as an academic discipline offers a solution to these problems by providing concepts and methodologies for high-quality, effective knowledge representation and transfer which can also be applied in practice. The methods and principles offered by the discipline of terminology are nowadays used for various purposes:
1. condensing of subject-field information;
2. searching for stored subject-field information (indexing, classification, thesaurus construction);
3. development of knowledge banks and other knowledge-based systems;
4. formulation of subject-field information;
5. transferring the contents of knowledge from one language into another (interpreting, translating);
6. communication of knowledge (teaching of the subject field, transfer of knowledge).

Terminological methods and principles may, in summary, serve as a basis for different types of activities ranging from classification to teaching and indexing, as well as the display of different points of view with regard to the contents of the various concepts and their interrelationships in a subject field.

WHAT IS THE PRESENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO TERMINOLOGY?

One of the main findings confirmed by the POINTER Project is that even though the discipline has gained enormously in importance during the past decades, and that it is being taught as an academic discipline in many universities and training programmes for translators all over the world, the concept of terminology itself is poorly understood, and in some cases even unknown. This applies both to the general public and to the people who are doing the work in practice, be they so-called "domain experts" such as engineers, lawyers, public administrators, doctors and software programmers, or language and communications specialists such as translators, technical writers and documentalists. In particular, management awareness is extremely limited, despite the macro- and micro-economic importance of the subject. In addition, there is some resistance, especially among translators, to switch to computerized procedures because for them it involves money, time, training, etc.

Another problem is the fact that there is a plethora of terminographical and lexicological sources in a great number of fields scattered over a great number of institutions, data banks, and organisations. There is little dialogue between the

actors and even if there is some sort of cooperation often there are great difficulties in the exchange of information because of problems with inter-system compatibility.

The biggest threat is the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the role of terminology by top management (i.e. those who control the budget for the execution of terminological projects) . This can lead to no or inadequate funding and other obstacles such as overprotection of terminological data. Often, there is a huge gap between what is asked of the people charged with the task of terminology work in terms of number of pages to be translated, required quality, etc. and the manpower and tools provided for carrying out the task. As a result of the work load, terminology work is often limited to updating a term list or database. The process of dealing with terminological problems is often unsystematic (i.e. without the use of proper procedures). The work is often carried out irregularly (i.e. when there is time left over from other projects and often without knowledge of the existing standards, tools, methods and principles. Furthermore, many translation exercises deal with multiple subject fields or are highly interdisciplinary in nature.

Since terminology as a discipline, its tools, methods and resources are still relatively unknown, the provision of information on the usefulness of terminological procedures and principles for the management of terminology work is of great importance for improving and facilitating terminology work. In order to be able to achieve this, cooperation on national, regional, European and international levels is a prerequisite. The global demand is increasing both as regards languages (terminologies crop up in every more languages, and existing one are expanded and improved), and in respect of special fields. The methodology of terminological activities must be expanded accordingly in order to permit harmonisation, standardisation, co-ordination, but also individual research and the accomplishment of economic goals. Experience has shown that the lack of systematic terminology work may result in considerable cost or diminished utility in the future.

As a consequence of this situation, the POINTER Consortium recommended three main measures at the European level:
1. The foundation of a broad-based, user-oriented, non-profit membership association: European Association for Terminology (EAFT);
2. The further implementation of the Terminology College in the European Language Resources Association (ELRA) as the production- and commercially oriented wing of the terminology field, and as the interface to related language engineering disciplines;
3. The creation of a European Terminology Information Server (ETIS) designed to make non-proprietary information falling outside the remit of ELRA available to all parties.

EXAMPLES OF THE ROLE OF TERMINOLOGY IN DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION. STANDARDISATION. TRANSLATION AND TRAINING

The role of terminology in documentation

A large majority of documents today are designed for specialist communication (including business and commercial texts). They are thus written in specialist language, 30-80% of which is composed of terminology. The major part of the knowledge of a company or an authority is saved in written form in various kinds of documents (files, books, and magazines, etc.) and stored all over the place. Those responsible for documentation are entrusted with assessing the information, processing it, and making it accessible so that any desired information may be obtained from the respective documents. This breakdown must provide a structure of the subject matter contained in the overall complex of material and must permit the retrieval of selective documents.

Terminology and documentation have for a long time been considered as two different fields of knowledge and activities. It is only a few years ago that a step towards an interdisciplinary and integrative model of linking the two and creating a new field of application/knowledge came about (T&D). In Terminology and Documentation, the two different principles of classificat ion of data used by the two disciplines are combined. Terminological classifications are based on relationships between concepts and are recognised as the microstructure of knowledge permitting information on individual and related concepts. The documentation languages are recognised as the macrostructure of knowledge permitting the overall access to all other kinds of information. Terminology and Documentation is becoming the central issue for any kind of information management and knowledge organisation. A Terminology & Documentation model is at the same time the core of any type of knowledge database. The growing interrelationship between terminology and documentation will have a significant influence on information management in companies and consequently on the training of students in information and communication.

Furthermore, there is a direct influence of terminological principles and methods on the creation of multilingual thesauri. Fast developing and newly emerging subject fields are confronted with the problem of the existence of scientific terminology versus a terminology that is specifically created for the general public. Besides this, terms are being coined not only by the specialists working in the field, but also by others whose task it is to describe the problems in the field and to deal with these problems, such as legislators, standardisation organisations, journalists. The use of terminological methods for the analysis of the concepts in all languages involved will supply the basis for solving these translation problems.

The role of terminology in information management

The importance of quick retrieval of sufficient and precise information has not been left unnoticed by modern technology. New contributions in this field are changing our world in many ways. An important result is our ability to retrieve information within seconds from every corner of the earth. Global competition and global cooperation - both of which presuppose global communication - are now common concepts. This in itself has serious consequences for the way in which the information is handled. With the growing demand for information, the need for effective and advanced information-management systems has become correspondingly acute, since the required information must be retrieved and handled quickly, easily and preferably at low cost. Many on-line data banks exit which can provide the public with many different types of information. In practice, however, the possibilities of modern technology and the exponential growth of available information lead among other things to great difficulties in communication, and the retrieval of information from these systems often entails considerable problems.

In order to be able to systematize information to be entered in a database or to analyze vast amounts of data retrieved from various systems, the vocabulary of the subject field need to be controlled. "Controlled", in this sense, means that there is a great need for the development of term keeping up with the developments in the subject field in question, thus helping to create consistent vocabularies. The existence of terminological data banks makes the use of reliable terminology imperative if they are to function efficiently. Systematic terminology work based on the model provided by terminology theory and training programs is essential to achieve this goal.

The result of the increasing awareness in companies of terminological methods and principles is the existence of a great number of monolingual and multilingual terminological databanks and data bases which at the moment can be entered and used freely via the Internet and the World Wide Web. Conceptual information has become more and more important. The result of this is the existence of flexible terminological information systems that meet the needs and requirements of very different user groups.

The role of terminology in standardisation

The standardisation of terminology is often crucial to many domains and levels of communication (particularly scientific, technical, medical legal). Standardised terminologies can have very different authoritative status, depending on the field of standardisation in which they occur. Standardised terminologies (i.e. standardised systems of concepts to which standardised terms or graphical symbols are assigned) are created in many working groups or subcommittees at the national, European and

international level.

Terminology standardisation can be viewed from a number of perspectives:
1. standardisation of basic principles and theory of terminology;
2. standardisation of the methodology of terminology work, covering both
   - conventional methods and
   - computer-assisted methods;
3. standardisation of terminologies, which is dependent on
   - the kind of theories in the respective subject fields;
   - representation conventions concerning the written communication of the respective subject field;
4. impact of terminology standardisation on other
   - standardising activities (e.g. quality management, documentation)
   - subject field or language related activities;
5. impact of other standards on terminology standardisation, such as
   - standardisation of symbols and codes
   - quality management
   - documentation
   - information processing (e.g. SGML, data modelling)

Within the framework of the standardisation activities of the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) terminological activities are carried out on three levels:
1. the standardisation of specific technical terminologies: almost all of the more than 2 00 ISO Technical Committees have special working groups devoted to terminology;
2. the standardisation of principles and methods which form the basis for terminology standardisation. This standardisation of terminological principles is carried out by ISO/TC 37 "Terminology (Principles and co-ordination") Committee;
3. the terminological determination on the meta-level of standardisation: e.g. standardisation vocabulary/ rules for the elaboration and demonstration of terminological standards, compilation of a standard thesaurus for efficient retrieval of standard information.

With regard to the standardisation of terminological principles and methods often critical remarks are heard. The subject field of terminology is still under development and there is still considerable duplication of effort and conflict of interests which often proved to be harmful to the overall objective of providing guidance for improved standards. Because of inadequate coordination between various technical committees, standards may be deficient, inconsistent or contradictory.

With regard to standardised terminologies there are several problems. One of the principal problems is the high costs of these standards and relative inaccessibility. Copyright law often forbids multiple use.

State-of-the-art methodology for terminology work, terminology project management and terminological tools introduced into standardisation activities will considerably improve the quality level as well as (re)usability of existing standardised and other authoritative terminologies.

The role of terminology in translation

Translators and technical writers are frequently forced to perform terminology management on an ad hoc basis, dealing with disconnected subsets of terminology that occur in isolation. The translator must frequently cope with partial knowledge and incomplete concept systems. Furthermore, many translation exercises deal with multiple subject fields or are highly interdisciplinary in nature. In scope and methodology, the systematic approach that is stressed in terminology training programmes and standards is subject-field driven. This means that translators have time to collect materials, selecting terminology, and organising it according to logical concept systems. This approach affords the opportunity to work with experts and to draft careful definitions. In contrast, ad hoc terminology management is text-driven: translators create their own terminology resources from random extracts from a domain.

Since the principles and methods of terminology (use of procedures for terminology work, reliable sources, standards) are still not being recognized as a necessary and useful part of the translation process, the incentive among translators to become better acquainted with the subject field in question and its information centres is limited. However, experience has shown that the lack of terminological information on concepts and terms may result in considerable cost or diminished utility in the future. The proper assignment of information units to data categories is essential if information is to be fully retrievable and manipulatable.

Information on the usefulness of terminological procedures, methods, principles and tools for the management of terminology is of great importance for improving and facilitating the translation process. National terminology associations play an essential role in supplying information on the field of terminology, its procedures, tools and resources. On a European level the EAFT will play an important role in the development, modification, adoption and publication of methodological tools.

Terminology and training

Terminology training is often provided in the context of a broader curriculum, or as part of a broader professional role. Terminology is being taught at a number of levels and for a range of purposes. The most extensive training is available in the context of translation programmes. Since the early 1980s, the number of institutions that train translators for special

language applications and that have fully integrated termino-
logical components in their curriculum has increased. Such
courses are primarily practice-oriented and are increasingly
supported by terminology database management programs.

Terminology is also taught in the form of intensive post-
graduate courses, or on-the-job training using in-house termi-
nology management systems. There are post-graduate courses for
practising translators, teachers of special languages, termi-
nology consultants, terminology teachers and researchers.

Practice-oriented introductory courses are provided for prac-
tising professional translators, term bank staff, information
and documentation personnel, standardisers and language
planners.

The number of people active in terminology work is large,
although often hidden in other activities. The consequence of
this fact is that there is at present no standard way in which
the work performed by these various groups can be compared and
evaluated. Therefore, although terminology training exists, it
naturally covers a range of objectives and is offered at many
different types of institutions using different terminology
training programs.

Concluding remarks

Technological and scientific developments demand the effective
management of the new concepts and terms that come into exist-
ence as a consequence of these developments. Terminology will
increasingly be one of the main factors in document management
and retrieval, in workflow and groupware systems. Terminologi-
cal resources will play an important role as reference works,
in standardisation and harmonisation activities, and as the
input (or output) of a wide range of applications. The European
Association for Terminology aims to facilitate terminological
activities and to be a vehicle for promoting the profession and
awareness of it.

The main tasks of the European Association for Terminology
are:
1. to further plurilingualism through terminology;
2. to heighten the awareness of the importance of terminology
    for communication in specific domains and across linguistic
    barriers among the general public, decision makers, domain
    experts and language professionals;
3. to facilitate the exchange of terminological information
    related to specific sectors, and related issues such as
    value analysis and quality, and hence to promote the
    quality and quantity of terminological work performed, user
    orientation, and the reusability of resources, by means of
    European-level special interest groups (SIGs) composed of
    terminologists and domain specialists;
4. to use workshops, electronic media, brainstorming sessions
    and other channels to create a forum for discussion on the

direction of terminology work in Europe, and to create an arena in which actors with the same, similar and related interests can meet;
5. through further development of a model developed during POINTER to obtain agreement on accreditation, qualifications and recognition of courses for vocational training, including the principles of terminology, tools, domain-specific issues and administration skills;
6. through the cooperation of many experts to function as a lobby organisation and to deliver statements, advice and expert opinions on matters concerning terminology policy, innovations and technology assessment;
7. to play a major role in the implementation of the European Terminology Information Server (ETIS).

In carrying out its tasks, the EAFT aims to establish cooperation with all actors in the field of terminology and related fields to obtain synergy effects.

FURTHER READING

Copies of the POINTER Final Report and of the Executive Summary can be obtained from BJL Consult sa/nv, Boulevard du Souverain 207/12, B-1160 Brussles, Belgium. Contact person: Mr. Corentin Roulin. In addition, the text of the Final Report is available on the POINTER homepage on the World Wide Web (http://www.surrey.ac.uk/MCS/AI/pointer/).

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