Terminology: theory and practice

Points for discussion

- Theory of terminology

- Practical terminology

- Functions of terminology

- Schools and working methods in terminology

Terminology

- a practice dealing with social needs that are often related to political and/or commercial ends

- a true scientific discipline that owes much to the other subject fields from which it borrows fundamental concepts

Terminology

intermediate position:

recognize that terminology contains some original theoretical aspects

Theory of Terminology

18th-19th century

scholars were

- alarmed by the proliferation of terms and
- worried about the diversity of forms and the relationships between forms and concepts

Theory of Terminology

scholars were not

- concerned with the nature of concepts

- concerned with the foundations for creating new terms

Theory of Terminology

Terminological theory arose and developed

through practical experience that is, in its turn, motivated by the need to provide solutions

to language-based problems in communication

Theory of Terminology

- the Austrian school
- the Soviet school
- the Czech school

Theory of Terminology

1. considers terminology to be an interdisciplinary but autonomous subject at the service of scientific and technical disciplines

2. focuses on philosophy, which is primarily interested in the logical classification of concept systems and the organization of knowledge

3. focuses on linguistics, which considers terminology a subcomponent of a language's lexicon and special languages as subsystems of general language

Theory of Terminology

A general theory of terminology
is based upon the first approach
in which the nature of concepts,
conceptual relations, the relationships between terms
and concepts and assigning terms to concepts
are of prime importance

Theory of Terminology

- terminographers assign names to concepts; i.e. they move from the concept to the term (an onomasiological process)

- lexicographers start with the word and characterize it functionally and semantically; i.e., they move from the word to the concept, precisely in the opposite direction (a semasiological process)

Theory of Terminology

- in the priority of the concept over the designation

- in being exclusively concerned with the level of the terminological unit and not with the other levels of linguistic description

- in excluding any diachronic approach or information

Theory of Terminology

E. Wüster

- terminology is concerned with the relationship between the sciences such as physics, chemistry, medicine, etc. and a combination of other disciplines such as linguistics, logic, ontology, and computer science

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and lexicology differ

- in the way they conceive and deal with their approach to the object of study

- in the object of study itself, in their methodology

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and lexicology differ

- in the way terms are presented

- in the conditions that must be taken into account when proposing new terms

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and logic

- terminology is primarily concerned with the relationship between objects in the real world and the concept that represent them

- logic uses a process of abstraction to generalize from various objects that exist in the real world to arrive at the concept or class of objects

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and logic

- share an interest in the way concepts relate to one another

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and ontology

- share an interest in the nature of "things" in the real world and the relationships established in this world

Theory of Terminology

Terminology and computer science

- computer science is one of the keys to terminology because of the enormous possibilities it offers to store and retrieve information and to order conceptual systems (E. Wüster)

Theory of Terminology

- Terminology is at the service of science, technology and communication; as a result, it must work within the limits of providing a service to other disciplines

- The current development of terminology is the result of advances in technology and the ever increasing need for specialized communication among communities with different languages

Practical terminology

- some people believe that terminology is nothing more than a new perspective adopted by these older disciplines

- terminology is currently seen as an art or practice rather than as a science

Practical terminology

- one position claims that terminology is a separate discipline with its own theory

- the other claims that terminology owes its theoretical assumptions to other, more consolidated disciplines

Practical terminology

some scientists (Sager)

although not granting terminology

a full independent status, acknowledge that the field

has theoretical foundations

upon which terminological practice is based

Practical terminology

Defined as the process of compiling, describing, processing and presenting the terms of special subject fields in one or more languages, terminology is not an end in itself, but addresses social needs and attempts to optimize communication among specialists and professionals by providing assistance either directly or to translators or to committees concerned with the standardization of a language.

Practical terminology

the purposes terminology processing wants to achieve:

- facilitating communication among specialists

- the self-assertion of technologically non-dominant languages by means of suitable intervention in and planning of language usage

The functions of terminology

- For linguists, terminology is a part of the lexicon defined by subject matter and pragmatic usage

- For subject field specialists, terminology is the formal reflection of the conceptual organization of a special subject and a necessary medium of expression and professional communication

The functions of terminology

- For end-users (either direct or intermediary) terminology is a set of useful, practical communication units which are assessed according to criteria of economy, precision, and suitability

- For language planners, terminology is an area of a language requiring intervention in order to reaffirm its usefulness and survival and to ensure its continuity as a means of expression through modernization

The functions of terminology

- users of terminology for direct communication or communication through intermediaries (terminology is a tool for communication)

- terminologists, who write glossaries, facilitate communication, or mediate in some other way (it is the target of their work)

Users

- direct users

- intermediaries who use terminology to facilitate communication for other users

Users

The direct users of terminology
are the specialists in each subject field.
For them, terminology is a necessary tool
for communication and an important element
for conceptualizing their own subject matter

Users

Specialists

- use terminology regardless of whether a term is appropriate within a particular linguistic system or not

- their interest in terminology focuses on concepts and how they can be named clearly and unambiguously

Users

Terminology intermediaries

- translators

- technical writers

- interpreters

Users

- Terminologists, terminographers and neologists, language planners and information scientists must be both specialists in language, information and documentation and in an appropriate subject field

- their work consists of compilation, description, processing and creation of terms

Schools and working methods in terminology

- Austria, the former Soviet Union, the former Czechoslovakia

- West (France, Canada, Quebec)

- North (Belgium and Scandinavia)

Schools and working methods in terminology

- South (Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South America, Portugal, Spain)

- East (China and Japan)

Schools and working methods in terminology

main objectives:

- terminology adapted to the linguistic system (the linguistic approach),

- terminology for translation (the translation approach),

- terminology for planning (the *aménagiste* approach, as it is known in Canadian French)

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

- Vienna

- Prague

- Moscow

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

The Vienna school of terminology

- based on the work of E. Wüster

- has developed a systematic corpus of principles and methods that constitute the basis of much theoretical work and modern practice

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

The Vienna school of terminology

- focuses on concepts, and steers terminological work towards the standardization of terms and concepts

- arose from the needs of technicians and scientists to standardize the terminology of their fields in order to ensure efficient communication and transfer of knowledge among specialists

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

The Czech school of terminology (L. Drodz)

- arose as a result of the functionalist linguistic approach of the Prague school of linguistics

- almost exclusively concerned with the structural and functional description of special languages, in which terminology plays an important role

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

The Czech school of terminology (L. Drodz)

- arose as a result of the multilingual nature of its geographical area

- interested in the standardization of languages and terminologies, and its terminological work was linked to the Czech Language Institute (a part of the Academy of Sciences)

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

The Russian school of terminology (Caplygin, Lotte, Wüster's work)

- interested in the standardization of concepts and terms in the light of the problems connected with the multilingualism in the former Soviet Union (now the Commonwealth of Independent States)

a. Terminology adapted to the linguistic system

These three schools of terminology

have given shape to the theoretical basis

of terminology and the methodological principles

governing its application

b. Translation-oriented terminology

- is highly developed in institutionally bilingual or multilingual provinces or countries (Quebec, the Walloon part of Belgium)

- forms the basis for the terminological activities carried out by multilingual international bodies (UN, UNESCO, EU, FAO)

b. Translation-oriented terminology

- represents the most important motivation for the creation of terminological databanks (TERMIUM of the Canadian government, EURODICAUTOM of the EU, BTQ of the Quebec provincial government)

- establishes terminological equivalents in the various languages which are used as points of reference by translators and which contribute to the quality of a translated text

c. Terminology oriented towards language planning

Language planning

- started in the 1960s

- intended to introduce policies supportive of the use of minority languages inside larger sociolinguistic areas