

## **Peculiarities of Terminography**

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### **Rezumat**

În lucrare sunt abordate câteva dintre particularitățile analizate frecvent în studiile asupra diferențelor dintre terminografie și lexicografie. Dintre acestea menționăm: domeniul, modul de abordare, natura datelor înregistrate, modul de prezentare către utilizatori, metoda de realizare, nivelul de comunicare, utilizatori, realizatori, produse. Aceste aspecte sunt considerate a fi reprezentative în evidențierea particularităților terminografiei. În finalul lucrării sunt menționate câteva dintre tendințele care se manifestă în prezent în dezvoltarea terminografiei.

### **I. Preliminaries**

Our paper tackles some of the frequently debated issues in terminology nowadays, namely, the peculiarities of terminography. The starting point of the whole discussion on terminography and its relationship to previous subjects dealing with language resources originates in the long lexicographic tradition based on numerous theoretical works and a great number of lexicographic products.

The ever increasing number of special fields has brought about the need of sharing, of communicating knowledge existing in these fields, possible only by means of appropriate terminology. Consequently, there was an increasing need for adequate means of collecting, storing and presenting terms, the task of terminography. Thus, we may define terminography as a set of practices and methods used for the collection, description and presentation of terms. To cope with such demanding requirements, terminographers had to develop the theoretical basis and the specific methodology of terminography, as distinct from those of lexicography.

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The last decade has witnessed a genuine “hunt” for differences between terminography and lexicography (Bergenholtz and Kaufmann, 1997). We consider it is due to the analysis of these rather artificial “contradictions” that terminography succeeded to clarify its peculiarities.

Terminologically speaking, various labels have been used to name terminography: ‘lexicography of special languages’, ‘terminological lexicography’, ‘LSP lexicography’, ‘specialised lexicography’. Not only many non-specialists, but even many people working in language engineering and translation, frequently confuse these concepts. The above mentioned terms have been considered synonyms of ‘terminography’, especially because many terminographers have started their activity as lexicographers. On the other hand, other specialists, e.g. terminographers of the Vienna School, emphasize the dissimilarities between LSP lexicography and terminography, two different disciplines. Although various synonyms have been used in the literature, nowadays terminography is contrasted to lexicography, a fair choice, in our opinion, considering, at least, the formal aspect and the etymology of the two terms.

The work and objectives of lexicographers and terminographers are in many ways complementary. In a rather recent book (Cabr , 1998 ) these similarities are synthesized as follows: both lexicography and terminography deal with words; both have a theoretical and applied character; both aim at producing dictionaries. However, in our opinion, these statements oversimplify the problem under discussion.

The following lines summarize the terminographers’ main arguments in favour of a clear-cut distinction between terminography and lexicography, pointing out the peculiar -ities of terminography.

## **II. Peculiarities of Terminography**

### Scope

Even if terminography, like lexicography, deals with words, the former is concerned only with the words belonging to special subject fields. As subject fields represent delimited areas of knowledge, terminography undergoes this constraint of being bound to clearly delimited fields of knowledge. While lexicography is interested in all the words used by general language users, related to different subjects, practically unlimited, terminographers have to first of all establish and classify knowledge according to subject fields and sub-fields in order to make knowledge accessible and comprehensible within the range of human understanding; that is, provide, by subject field classification (according to rigorous criteria), a means of managing numerous terms.

Several subject field classifications have been developed e.g. the Lench scheme used by the term bank of the European Union, EURODICAUTOM; a classification into groups and subgroups provided within the International Classification for Standards.

One of the main concerns of terminographers is the adoption of standardized subject field classification that makes possible the exchange of terminological information.

### Approach

As distinct from various branches of linguistics that have the word as a basic unit, terminography is characterized by the conceptual approach; the basic unit for terminography is the term assigned to a concept. Even if formally the term *is* a word, it is not *any* word; it is only the word (term) assigned to a concept in a subject field. Therefore, the conceptual approach is considered a key issue for terminography.

At the same time, terminographers speak about the synchronic approach as being the only concern for them. They focus their interest on the significance of a term at the present moment, ignoring its history. The updating of terms, as a regular current operation, reflects the fast development of the various subject fields.

Also, the opposition between the semasiological and onomasiological approach has clearly contributed in distinguishing the peculiarities of terminography. When general language elements are analysed, the starting point is the form of the word; one proceeds from the existing words to identify the different meanings of the word form. This is referred to as the semasiological approach. In terminology, the starting point is the concept. When the relationships between concepts have been identified, the meaning of the concept becomes conspicuous. To make the concept known, a form – the term, is necessary. Thus, a form (a name, i.e. the term) is assigned to the concept, i.e. the meaning. This is called the onomasiological approach.

### Nature of data

Since terms are created in view of providing accurate and precise communication among professionals in various fields, the principle of univocity – one term assigned to one concept – still has an important role, even if lately doubts have been expressed with respect to this.

The classical ideal of monosemy to be observed by terms is decisive for term entries as well. Lexicographic products provide linguistic information and pragmatic information. The user of such products expects to find for each linguistic unit information about the graphic form (including variants), phonetic form (including variants), grammatical classes, meaning

– numerous synonyms throughout the dictionary, plenty of polysemes, homonyms etc. within one entry, reference to usage.

On the other hand, a terminological entry includes linguistic information of a different nature, conceptual information and pragmatic information, only partly similar to lexicographic data. Terminographers, interested in observing the precision and accuracy to be achieved by terms in professional communication, focus on preferred forms that stand most chances to be standardized; consequently, graphic variants, phonetic variants, regional variants are none of their concern. Only total synonyms go under one entry. If one term has more meanings (polysemy) in different fields or within the same field, each meaning corresponds to one concept, respectively, one separate entry. Grammatical information is reduced to a minimum and canonical forms are compulsory. The conceptual information represents the main section and it is meant to relate the term to the system of concepts it belongs to. Reference to the subject field and the corresponding subfields is followed by a definition aimed at stating the distinguishing characteristics of each term within the various classes / categories of each subfield. This time, the pragmatic information, represented primarily by the context and the usage notes, supports the definition and highlights peculiarities in usage. Lately, adding collocations has become common practice, and is meant to enrich and validate the term usage.

#### Presentation to users

General language dictionaries follow, generally, the alphabetical ordering of entries, as they are bound to words; by tradition, this type of ordering has been considered ideal for any dictionary. In a proper terminographic product, the systematic ordering of entries is preferred. At the same time, the electronic medium, highly favoured by terminology users, has succeeded to overcome some of the drawbacks of traditional hard-copy lexicography (e.g. limited amount of information that can be published under one item, time between printing and the development of subject fields).

#### Method

The sources used to collect the general language items for dictionaries are, as a rule, both oral and written. The informants are native speakers; for words encountered in subject fields, experts of that field are addressed. Although terminographers count, as well, on both written and oral sources, it is mainly the written sources (the documentation of a specific subject field) that are considered reliable. The informants are subject field experts, familiar with knowledge of the field.

### Level of communication

Such style labels as formal, informal, slang, archaic, vulgar etc. have no relevance to communicators specialized in different fields. The various professional communication situations are affected by the specialism knowledge of the interlocutors; in other words, the parties involved in various communication situations – subject experts, subject semi-experts, lay persons- decide on the communication content, and terminographic products are designed, consequently, function of the users' profile.

### Users

People with different knowledge of the world, with different background education look for general information in general language dictionaries. There is a very wide range of users who are able to access information in such dictionaries. By definition, there is a limited number of potential clients involved in accessing subject field knowledge by means of terminology.

### Producers

Again, by tradition, general language dictionaries are the result of lexicographic activity, lexicographers being responsible for dictionary making. As terminology is quite an interdisciplinary science, more 'actors' are involved in the making of terminographic products, such: experts in subject fields, terminologists, translators, teachers of special languages, terminology centres, standardization institutions.

### Products

The frequently quoted classification of specialised dictionaries outlined by Herbert Picht ( 1985 ) has been refined and updated in time. The initial dichotomies – monolingual / multilingual, alphabetic / systematic, with phraseological information / without phraseological information, with definitions / without definitions, referring to one subject field / several subject fields, normative / descriptive – has turned into : special language dictionaries and lexica, standards and other regulatory documents, terminology databases, knowledge databases, technical encyclopedia.

## **Conclusions**

The need for economical and speedy production of multilingual dictionaries, improved quality of end products, a universal interchange format coping with globalization requirements, active user involvement will be a few of the factors deciding on new peculiarities of present-day terminography.

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