

ABOUT THE TERMINOLOGY AND LEXICOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

One particular area of confusion highlighted by the POINTER Project is that of the differences between terminology and lexicology, and terminography and lexicography. Not only many non-specialists, but even many individuals working in such fields as language engineering and translation frequently confuse these concepts, and it is hoped that the explanations given below will contribute to a clearer understanding of the distinctions between these fields of activity.

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While lexicology is the study of words in general, terminology is the study of special-language words or terms associated with particular areas of specialist knowledge. Neither lexicology nor terminology is directly concerned with any particular application. Lexicography, however, is the process of making dictionaries, most commonly of general-language words, but occasionally of special-language words (i.e. terms). Most general-purpose dictionaries also contain a number of specialist terms, often embedded within entries together with general-language words. Terminography (or often misleadingly "terminology"), on the other hand, is concerned exclusively with compiling collections of the vocabulary of special languages. The outputs of this work may be known by a number of different names - often used inconsistently - including "terminology", "specialised vocabulary", "glossary", and so on.

The work and objectives of lexicographers and terminographers are in many ways complementary, but there are a number of important differences which need to be noted. Dictionaries are word-based: lexicographical work starts by identifying the different senses of a particular word form. The overall presentation to the user is generally alphabetical, reflecting the word-based working method. Synonyms - different form same meaning - are therefore usually scattered throughout the dictionary, whereas polysemes (related but different senses) and homonyms (same form, different meaning) are grouped together.

While a few notable attempts have been made to produce conceptually-based general-language dictionaries - or "thesauri", the results of such attempts are bound to vary considerably according to the cultural and chronological context of the author.

By contrast, high-quality terminologies are always in some sense concept-based, reflecting the fact that the terms which they contain map out an area of specialist knowledge in which encyclopaedic information plays a central role. Such areas of knowledge tend to be highly constrained (e.g. "viticulture"; "viniculture"; "gastronomy"; and so on, rather than "food and drink"), and therefore more amenable to a conceptual organisation than is the case with the totality of knowledge covered by general language. The relations between the concepts which the terms represent are the main organising principle of terminographical work, and are usually reflected in the chosen manner of presentation to the user of the terminology. Conceptually-based work is usually presented in the paper medium in a thesaurus-type structure, often mapped out by a system of classification (e.g. UDC) accompanied by an alphabetical index to allow access through the word form as well as the concept. In terminologies, synonyms therefore appear together as representations of the same meaning (i.e. concept), whereas polysemes and homonyms are presented separately in different entries.

In the electronic medium, similar considerations apply in principle to the organisation of entries with reference to synonyms and polysemes/homonyms. However, the retrieval of data still operates at present largely through the term (or a component ! of the term) rather than through the concept. Conceptually-based solutions for the representation and retrieval of data are being sought in the techniques of artificial intelligence.

Work organised conceptually may also be presented alphabetically, whereas the converse, i.e. the presentation of work originally organised according to the form of the word in a thesaurus-type structure, is highly problematic.

Lexical meaning

In dictionaries, related but different senses (or "polysemes") of the same word form are usually presented within one entry, e.g. *bridge* (of a violin, crossing a river, over a gap in teeth); unrelated different senses ("homonyms") of the same word form are normally presented as separate head words or entries, e.g. *pupil* (of the eye) and *pupil* (in a school). Synonym relations are not always made explicit in dictionaries, and the division of word forms into different senses tends to vary considerably between dictionaries. This lack of clear division into senses reflects the

"slippery" nature of general-language words, compared to the more precise nature of terminological meaning.

In terminologies, homonyms and polysemes within the same subject field are treated as separate entries in a terminology (because the definition of the concept is different), e.g. in Automotive Engineering *emission* (the process of emitting exhaust gases) and *emission* (the exhaust gases themselves). Homonyms and polysemes of other subject fields are excluded. Synonyms, on the other hand, are always included as a part of the same entry in a terminology (being alternative representations of the same concept), e.g. *automotive catalyst*, *catalytic converter*.

Grammar

The "headwords" or rather "entry terms" in terminologies are all open-class words, i.e. nouns (the vast majority), some adjectives, verbs and adverbs. The headwords in general-language dictionaries cover all word classes, including so-called grammatical words such as modal auxiliaries (e.g. *can*, *must*), prepositions (e.g. *on*, *with*), articles (e.g. *the*, *an*), certain adverbs (e.g. *very*), and so on. In terminologies, such words may appear as a component of the term or be shown as a part of the term's phraseology (i.e. the usual pattern of its immediate linguistic environment), but never as independent entry terms.

Usage *versus* regulation

Dictionaries of the general language are descriptive in their orientation, arising from the lexicographer's observation of usage. Terminologies may also be descriptive in certain cases (depending on subject field and/or application), but prescription (also: "normalisation" or "standardisation") plays an essential role, particularly in scientific, technical and medical work where safety is a primary consideration. Standardisation is normally understood as the elimination of synonymy and the reduction of polysemy/homonymy, or the coinage of neologisms to reflect the meaning of the term and its relations to other terms. Terminologies - the outcome of this work, often in electronic form as termbases - are then the principal means of dissemination. In other words, in certain circumstances, terminologists may attempt to regulate language (in this case, the vocabularies of special languages), whereas lexicographers describe the words of general language.

Levels of communication

Lexicographers have at their disposal a number of "style labels" which aim to distinguish between, for instance, informal, slang, or vulgar expressions, archaisms, and so on. Terminologists also need to distinguish between different communicative

situations, although in a rather different way. While traditional terminology work is concerned mainly with the terms which characterise communication between subject experts, a broader view also incorporates less abstract levels of communication, e.g. between technicians, or between expert and layperson (such as doctor-patient; lawyer-client). In high-quality terminography, such variants must also be labelled or assigned to a particular source in order to identify the appropriate communicative context for their use.

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