

Getting our Act Together?

Towards a Solution for Terminology in Europe

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The Problems

Recent discussions among LISA members have highlighted the terminology problems facing localizers, documentation specialists and translation professionals, the product, among other things, of tighter deadlines, liability issues and quality pressures. Unfortunately, classic "make or buy" options for end users simply do not apply at present. In-house terminology work is slow and expensive, and bucks the trend towards tightly focused activities. This is true even of specialist language services providers, including localizers - terminology is never, ever core business. In addition, the specific combination of terminological, linguistic and domain skills needed to produce acceptable results is often lacking. And, with some honorable exceptions, the tools and methodologies to support this work are underdeveloped, poorly marketed, over-complicated and badly integrated with each other and with standard office environments.¹

At the same time, though, users are rarely able to acquire the terminology they need off-the-shelf. There are very few resources which are easily available, easily used, of high quality, up-to-date, and readily affordable. Not only do the economic pressures and production problems mentioned above inhibit potential producers or resellers, they are compounded in many cases by legal uncertainties concerning copyright and ownership and confidentiality. In many cases, too, appropriate marketing channels are missing, especially for the more esoteric - and less lucrative - domains and language combinations. Conversely, in other areas, official and de facto standards, validated and unvalidated terminologies, and conventional lexicographically produced dictionaries offer multiple and often conflicting sources. This problem is now exacerbated by the Internet which, while it is making much valuable terminology and source material available for the first time, also offers large amounts of dross. Without the domain knowledge and background information needed to distinguish between alternative resources, selection is often determined by price, availability, or luck rather than quality.

Last but not least, at a structural and organizational level, the terminology field is highly fragmented, underpaid and underpublicized. Lack of capacity and funding prevents many organizations from helping, while many people - end users and domain and language professionals alike - are unaware of the good work which has already been done. In addition, the field has been hampered by internecine warfare (both personal

¹ Thus there is no tool or suite of tools effectively covering the entire terminology lifecycle, from extraction through modeling and storage in a database to preparation for reutilization, while many of the individual components currently available do not plug and play, and in some cases require non-standard hardware platforms.

and national) in the past, a fact which has further reduced the effectiveness and attractiveness of its activities.

For all these reasons, we have some way to go before we can speak of a terminology market in any normal sense of the word, let alone market orientation or market maturity. In practice, terminology is not "driven" in a conventional marketing sense at all - neither by the vendors, who are few and far between, nor by its users. The consequences for this in a world of increasing globalization are significant.

Current Status and Progress

That having been said, considerable progress has been made in the last years:

At the *global* level, the "Vienna Group" of organizations centered around Infoterm (i.e. the terminology information center Infoterm itself; its project-based sister organization, TermNet; the ISO/TC 37 secretariat dealing with standardization issues; the GTW (Society for Terminology and Knowledge Transfer), and IITF the (International Institute for Terminology Research) has done much to publicize and organize the profession worldwide, to provide the basic methodologies and information needed for effective work, and to train many of today's leading practitioners and organizers. Although their actions have sometimes been controversial and their resources always hopelessly overstretched, their contribution should not be neglected. In fact, it is a sign of their success that many of their "children" have now achieved independence.

At the *regional* level, a number of networks based on particular languages or groups of languages have been working for a number of years, mainly to coordinate activities, prevent duplication of effort, share resources and benefit from each others' experience. Such networks include, among others, the intergovernmental organization Union Latine, RINT (International Network of Neology and of Francophone Terminology), REALITER (Pan-Latin Terminology Network), RITerm (Ibero-American Terminology Network), the RaDT (Council for Terminology in German) and Arabterm. While their scope and precise remit varies in each case, these networks are generally "organizations of organizations", and often focus primarily on the public sector. This also tends to be the case with the geographically-based networks such as NORDTERM (the terminology co-operation body for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), which cover issues of interest to a certain region, irrespective of the number of languages involved, or their relationship to one another.

At the *national* level the position is more heterogeneous. While it can be said that a large majority of countries have some degree of infrastructure for terminological activities (including structures designed for related professions, such as translators and technical writers, and for general language and language policy), the precise services and structures offered vary extremely widely. Among the commonest structures to be found are interest groups, professional associations, and focal points. In many cases, however, work is concentrated not on the creation and provision of terminology and related services, but on the more generalized, non-commercial information exchange. However, a number of professional/commercial centers of excellence and brokers (including the Deutsches Institut für Terminologie (DIT) e.V. and LinguaServe) have

recently emerged, while several universities (e.g. Saarbrücken, Rennes II and Innsbrück) are now making information, including the results of students' projects, available, often online.

A Terminology Infrastructure for Europe

The question of *European* terminology structures was addressed in the POINTER Project, the Final Report of which appeared at the beginning of this year. As has already been reported², over forty organizations across Europe joined forces to produce an overview of terminology work throughout Europe based on a uniform methodology, together with a blueprint for future activities and structures. As such, it represents a major display of unanimity and a solid basis for subsequent work.

In brief, the POINTER Final Report makes the following recommendations, designed to increase the quality and quantity of terminology work in Europe:

Operative measures

- The creation, dissemination and reutilization of high-quality terminology resources for a variety of different applications (e.g. human and machine translation, publication, information retrieval, etc.). This will largely be the work of market players (e.g. publishers, domain associations, and service providers), supported by the emerging focal points, brokers and where appropriate by ELRA, (the European Language Resources Association founded last year with the European Commission's backing to act as a motor for the distribution of non-commercial resources). In particular, it is very important that existing resource holders be encouraged and supported at the highest level to make their data available more generally.
- Methodological support and consultancy (the creation, dissemination and promotion of standards, quality assurance and validation models and procedures, knowledge transfer, information management, terminology planning, etc.). These services should largely be developed, performed and funded by existing and planned bodies such as the standardization organizations, existing or proposed national terminology centers, ELRA, and the emerging private sector.
- Technical support and consultancy (e.g. project management, tool implementation, systems integration, etc.). Here, too, the private sector, and existing or planned infrastructural organizations will provide most of the momentum needed.
- Tools development and distribution. The rapid introduction of global networking means that considerable further activity is to be expected and encouraged. Once again, tool development is basically the preserve of the private sector, although here, too, specific projects and innovative designs could attract R&D grants or subsidies.

² e.g. by the author and Christian Galinski (Infoterm) at the Vienna LISA Forum in July, 1995

- Academic and vocational training (e.g. in the principles of terminology, the use of methodologies, tools, domain-specific issues, information technology and business administration skills). While many activities already exist, the range and number of offerings needs to be increased, and activities co-ordinated. The majority of the work will be initiated by the relevant public and private sector actors/suppliers (including academic and vocational training institutions) and their respective customers/target groups, and by existing or planned infrastructural organizations.
- Information services (including registers of people and activities, bibliographies, market research and analysis, etc.). The terminology profession in general and the emerging terminology market with its need for reliable market data will be the main motors here.

Contents-based measures

- A broad-based public awareness campaign, supplemented by activities targeted at specific groups, is needed to raise awareness of the benefits of terminology for business and society, and to encourage terminology-related activities. This will largely be self-funded by the actors concerned.
- The development and widespread publication of solutions to current IPR and product liability problems in co-operation with legal experts and other affected groups, in order to facilitate the widespread provision of resources. This work should build on existing activities wherever possible, including ones co-financed by the European Commission.
- The development and promotion of concrete costing and cost/benefit models for terminology work to provide a sound basis for investment decisions. Short-term research grants should be made available if necessary.
- The development and promotion of quality assurance and validation methodologies and models as part of the activities of ELRA and others. These will help ensure the creation and distribution of resources with a clearly identified level of quality in the medium term, and hence promote market activities.

Infrastructure measures

In addition, the POINTER Consortium proposed a three-part terminology infrastructure at the European level, with the active participation and co-operation of existing organizations and individuals. This infrastructure is intended to provide the permanent focus necessary to ensure continuity and stability of more specific results and initiatives.

- The foundation of a broad-based, user-oriented, non-profit membership association (the European Association for Terminology, or EAFT), designed to facilitate the professionalisation of activities throughout Europe, to provide a forum for the reinforcement and co-ordination of activities at other levels, and to offer a home for special interest groups. By providing a framework and support for users and producers, it is hoped to help people help themselves to resolve the impasse mentioned at the start of this article.

- The continued implementation of the ELRA and its Terminology College (i.e. those members of ELRA active in the field) as the production- and commercially oriented wing of the terminology field, and as the interface to related language engineering disciplines.
- The creation by these two bodies and other interested parties of a European Terminology Information Server (ETIS) designed to make non-proprietary information falling outside the remit of ELRA available to all comers.

When in doubt, found an association?

It is obvious that the vast majority of measures listed above require time and - even more importantly - money for their implementation. Both of these are, as usual, in short supply, and the chances of major public investment in a time of general cuts are slight. Nevertheless, work on implementing the POINTER recommendations has continued since the end of the project. Thus the recommendation that the Infoterm/TermNet draft Guide to Terminology Agreements (which provides a checklist of points for inclusion in contracts, sample provisions and a code of good practice), be completed and published has been taken up by ELRA, which has supported the production of the German original and an English translation³. More fundamentally, two working groups comprising representatives from a large number of different European countries and terminology organizations are actively preparing for the EAFT and the Server.

In particular, plans for the Association are now well advanced, and it is aimed to found it in Kolding, Denmark on October 3, during the conference organized by the International Association for Language and Business (IALB). Designed as a non-profit professional association with the widest possible individual and organizational membership, it aims to promote the profession and good practice both externally and internally. To facilitate the widest possible membership, and to avoid conflicts of interests with national and other associations where these already exist, membership fees will be kept low and reciprocal membership arrangements investigated. At first, the EAFT's organizational structures will be relatively informal to allow maximum flexibility and cost-effectiveness, but it is planned in the longer term to grow it into a true professional association comparable to those for technical writers and translators.

The EAFT is expected to concentrate on the following areas:

Promotion of the Profession

- Specific activities to be performed include the further development and dissemination of the matrix model for accreditation of qualifications and experience outlined in the POINTER Project, plus the development, promotion and recognition of models and courses for vocational training ("certificate of proficiency").

³ The Guide is available in English and German from the ELRA office, 87 avenue d'Italie, F-75013, Tel. +33-1-4586-5300, Fax. +33-1-4586-4488, or from TermNet, Grüngasse 9/17, A-1050 Vienna, Tel. +43-1-586-7763, Fax: +43-1-586-7764, price 30,- ECU incl. postage

Public Awareness

- The aim should be the proactive, confident, well-argued promotion of the benefits of terminology to the mainstream of both business and society, which is still largely unaware of the subject and its importance. Methods and media used should include marketing and press articles, but also wider PR activities. In addition, there should be more specific information campaigns targeting different groups, e.g. senior and line management, domain experts, and language professionals.

Terminology Forum ("Ideas Market")

- The EAFT should use its position to provide an influential discussion arena for the profession. Several means of communication will probably be offered, including an electronic bulletin board, terminology summits (along the lines of the existing MT summits), smaller, in-depth workshops, informal brainstorming sessions, and an electronic journal.

European Terminology Conference

- There is a need for a regular, high-quality and high-level conference for the terminology field along the lines of the Language Engineering Conventions, to complement the more technical TKE conferences. If funding can be secured, the EAFT should host such a conference, which should include at least 50% industry participation, and have a high-level industry/academic board to review submissions for papers.

Methodologies

- Involvement in the development, modification, adoption and publication of methodological tools (e.g. the evaluation criteria for terminological resources produced by POINTER) is also important if the EAFT is to fulfill its role as a professional association. This work should, of course, be performed in close association with the other relevant European, national and international bodies (e.g. the European Language Resources Association, ELRA).

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

- The Association should set up Special Interest Groups (SIGs) devoted to specific topics. In particular, these should be used to create working parties dedicated to specific subject fields and issues. A pilot group on the value analysis of terminology work has been set up to test the basic model, which is similar in some ways to the SIGs within LISA. This area offers an existing nucleus of work and workers, plus the prospect of developing a reliable methodology that can be used by practitioners to quantify and demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of terminology work. A number of other SIGs, include several domain-related ones, are likely to follow quickly.

Liaison and Facilitation

- The Association should be actively involved in the setting up of the planned European Terminology Information Server, and with the concretization of the work

to be performed by the Terminology College within ELRA. This should be achieved both via formalized organizational links (e.g. reciprocal membership, observer status, seats in advisory boards, etc., as appropriate) and via the active participation of key players in all three organizations.

- In addition, the Association should liaise closely and on a regular basis with related disciplines (e.g. the localization industry, , technical writing and documentation, and AI), with European domain associations, and with national focal points, institutions and associations in the terminology field.

Expert Advice

- The Association should deliver expert opinions and statements on policy, technology and innovations, the market, etc., both on request and on its own initiative.

References

POINTER Final Report, 2 vols, February/March 1996

POINTER Executive Summary, April 1996

EAFT working documents (Backgrounder, draft statutes, SIG positioning paper)

Christian Galinski: "Global terminology co-operation - the "Vienna Group" in: ELRA Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1996