Lexicography versus Terminography

Dr Mariëtta Alberts
Manager: Standardisation and Terminology Development
Pan South African Language Board
Introduction

- Lexicography and Terminography are specialised professions concerned with the compilation and editing of dictionaries.
- Lexicographers document the words of the vocabulary of the general language.
- Terminographers document the terms of specific subject areas, domains or disciplines.
- This paper concerns itself with the similarities and the differences between the two professions.
Vocabulary

The vocabulary of a language is the total number of words in it.

A person's vocabulary is all the words of a specific language known to him.
Core vocabulary = common words
Lexicography

Lexicography is a formal word for the activity or profession of writing and editing dictionaries.
Lexicography (cont.)

- Lexicography comprises the recording of the words in the vocabulary of the language into a specific systematised format (e.g. alphabetically).

- Lexicography has two basic components:
  - The *theoretical component* which consists of the
    - general principles of the applied science
    - theoretical principles that form the basis for the general usage and expert principles; and
  - The *practical component* which deals with the applied science of compilation and editing of dictionaries.
Lexicography (cont.)

- Lexicography is the process in which linguistic information is being recorded, processed and compiled in a specific lexicographical format.

- The result of the lexicographical process is usually a wordlist, glossary, dictionary, thesaurus or electronic (computerised) databank.

- Information supplied:
  - spelling, pronunciation, definition/explanation (semantics), syllabification, translation equivalents, derived forms and compounds, grammatical class, usage (syntax), cross reference to other entries, illustrations, etymology, source references, etc.
Lexicography (cont.)

- A comprehensive general dictionary comprises all aspects of a given source language, i.e. common words, colloquial words, dialectal varieties, archaic words, etymology of words, words in literature, science, technology, slang, vulgar words, deprecated words, sexist words, taboo words, etc.

- A dictionary is an inventory of the vocabulary of a particular language, as well as a tool for communication in a particular language or in different languages (cf. Zgusta 1984)
Lexicography (cont.)

- A dictionary is a retrieval system in which are stored against the words of a language, explanations of the meanings of those words and the ways in which they are used (Keating 1979).

- The dictionary should contain enough information to allow the dictionary user to successfully determine relevant information (Zgusta 1984).
Lexicography (cont.)

- Lexicography works with **words**
  - Verbal vocabulary
  - Written vocabulary
- The vocabulary of a particular language is documented in a monolingual dictionary
- Different languages are compared in bilingual and multilingual dictionaries
- General dictionaries are **word-oriented** rather than topic-oriented (Cluver 1989)
Lexicography (cont.)

- Dictionaries serve as aids to the comprehension (decoding) or to the generation (encoding) of texts in a language or languages.

- Lexicography combines the double aim of general collecting of data on the lexicon of a language with providing an information and advisory service to language users.
Terminography

Terminography is a subdivision of lexicography that deals with technical and scientific terms. The vocabulary (called terminology) of a subject is the group of words (called terms) that are typically used when discussing it.
Terminography (cont.)

- Terminology refers to a **technical vocabulary**, i.e. a collection of terms which has a certain **coherence** because the terms belong to a **single subject area**.

- The conceptual system underlying terms belonging to a subject field or domain show such a close **generic, hierarchical or associative relationship** that it is impossible to regard them as **common words** belonging to the general vocabulary of the layperson.
Terminological relationships

Basic terminological relations

- Equivalent relation
- Preferred term: alimentary canal
- Synonym: digestive tract
- Quasi-synonym: gastrointestinal tract
Terminological relations:

Basic terminological relations

- Hierarchical relation
- Generic relation
- Subset relation

- Animal
  - Dog
    - Boxer
    - Alsatian
  - Cat
  - Donkey
  - Elephant
  - Persian
  - Burmese
Terminological relations:

Basic Terminological relations

- Hierarchical relation
  - Generic relation
  - Subset relation

South Africa

Gauteng

Pretoria

Mamelodi
Terminological relations:

Basic Terminological relations:

- Associative relation
  - insect, insecticide, insect repellent
  - herb, herbal, herbalist
Terminography (cont.)

- Terminology is concerned with the study and use of the systems of symbols and linguistic signs employed for human communication in specialised areas of knowledge and activities (Sager 1990).

- Terminology is the study of the field of activity concerned with the collection, description, processing and presentation of terms, which have a certain coherence because the terms belong to specialised areas of usage in one or more languages (cf. Sager 1990).
Terminography (cont.)

- A term is a visual, linguistic or non-linguistic representation of a mental concept and can be any of the following:
  - single term, compound word, phrase,
  - collocation, numeral, acronym, letter word,
  - abbreviation, chemical symbol, formula,
  - barcode, icon, mnemonic sign, etc.
Terminography (cont.)

- Terminology is discussed in the context of linguistics, information science, computational linguistics, etc.

- Terminology/terminography can be regarded as a number of practices that have evolved around the creation of terms, their collection, explication, presentation and dissemination.

- Terminography is an interdisciplinary practice linking linguistics, logic, ontology and information sciences with a variety of different subject areas and domains.

- The common element being the concern with the formal organisation of the complex relationships between concepts and terms.
Terminological triangle

Dr Mariëtta Alberts, TermTrain, 27
- 31 March 2006, SABS, Pretoria
A rectangle is a shape which has four sides and four angles, each of which is a right angle. Each side has the same length as the side opposite to it.
Terminography (cont.)

- Terminology has a restricted register
- The conceptual system of sciences is more systematic and exact than that of the general environment
- Definitions remain extremely important since they describe the meaning of concepts
- Definitions serve to standardise terms especially in scientific and technical language.
**Definition:** The terms arsonist and pyromaniac describe a person who sets fire to an object, but:

- **Arsonist**
  An **arsonist** is a **criminal** who **deliberately sets fire** to something, especially a **building**

- **Pyromaniac**
  A **pyromaniac** is a **person** who **cannot control the desire to set fire** to things, often because of a **mental illness**
Terminography (cont.)

- The terminology (vocabulary) of a subject is the group of terms (words) that are typically used in the specific subject.

- A dictionary containing terms is known as:
  - a technical dictionary,
  - a subject dictionary,
  - a term list,
  - a terminological dictionary or
  - a dictionary for specialised purposes
Terminography (cont.)

- Terms are the linguistic representation of concepts (Sager 1990)

- A technical dictionary contains the standardised terms of a particular subject or domain

- Technical dictionaries are therefore subject-oriented

- Terminology is divided by subject field before it is ordered in any other way
Terminography (cont.)

- Terminology work is **concept oriented**
- Point of departure: **concept**
- Principally **subject oriented** rather than language oriented
- **One to one relation** between **concept** and **term** for **exact communication**
- Terminology is a **standardising process**
Similarities

- There is no crucial difference between common language and specialised (technical) language – it is merely a continuum of registers, where words gradually change into terms and where meanings gradually become more specific.

- In a holistic sense workers in both professions use the same basic principles and procedures to record and disseminate.
Similarities (cont.)

- Lexicography and terminography are methodological facets of the profession with its first objective the systematic description and documentation of the usage of words or terms of a specific language community with its discernible culture and subcultures.

- The typology of the products shows that both professions compile monolingual, bilingual and multilingual dictionaries.

- These products can be explanatory or merely translating dictionaries.
Similarities (cont.)

- Documents the words/terms of a language according to the spelling and orthography rules of the given language.

- **Macrostructure:**
  - Alphabetical; retrograde
  - Unidirectional; bidirectional
  - Front matter; central matter; back matter

- **Microstructure:**
  - Explicit information
  - Implicit information
  - Information classes

- **Mediostucture:**
  - Cross-referencing system
MEDIOSTRUCTURAL ENTRIES

FRONT MATTER

CENTRAL TEXT
A - Z

BACK MATTER

SUBTEXTS
Similarities (cont.)

- The same basic methods are being used to describe the concept designated by the basic word or term.

- Therefore the process of lexicography and terminography can be placed on a continuous scale.

- This continuum stretches from context-dependent meanings in lexicography to context-free meanings in terminography (see Cluver 1992).
Similarities (cont.)

- Instead of dividing language in different registers, it could reflect a scale on which language functions – from informal (slang, vulgar) to the highly formal registers (science, technology) with various shades in between.

- The different shades implicate different grades of standardisation (i.e. some registers in terminology where standardisation is difficult) and general language where it is difficult to regulate (e.g. emotive connotations)
Differences

- **Lexicography**
  - Documents the words of language(s).
  - Accepts the arbitrariness of the sign.
  - The aim is to document, describe and preserve the vocabulary and its derivations within general language usage.

- **Terminography**
  - Documents the terminology of subject fields, domains, disciplines.
  - Strives to systematise principles of designation and to name concepts according to pre-specified principles.
  - The aim is to concentrate on a representation of the terminology of language for special purposes. Attention is given to user needs for information on a specific, marked area of human activity.
Differences (cont.)

- **Lexicography**
  - Point of departure: *language*
  - Interested in *spoken* and *written* form of language
  - Descriptive approach, describe and preserve
  - Records *all the words* of a given language (common, colloquial, jargon, dialects, slang, vulgar, archaic, literature, specialised)

- **Terminography**
  - Point of departure: *subject field/domain*
  - Interested mainly in *written* form of language
  - Prescriptive approach, describe concepts by means of definitions and terms to standardise
  - Records terms of different subject fields, domains and disciplines (polythematic)
Differences (cont.)

- **Lexicography**
  - **Semasiological** (meaning) approach which starts at the word and looks for its meaning
  - Emotional connotations could be attached to words, resulting in a shift of meaning

- **Terminography**
  - **Onomasiological** (naming) approach which starts at the concept and creates a name (term) for the concept
  - Terms are exact: One concept equals one term. No emotional connotations to be attached to terms.
Conclusion

- Several similarities between Lexicography and Terminography
- Distinct professions with clearly demarcated working areas, several differences
- The points of departure and methods of work differ
- The functions of the terminographer cannot be taken over by a lexicographer and *vice versa*
Thank you!

marietta@pansalb.org.za
Tel:  +27 (0)12 341 9638
Fax:  +27 (0)12 341 5938