Standardisation, modernisation and harmonisation in relation to socioterminology

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1. Introduction

- Although terminology can be regarded as an artificial language, the terminologist has to take various sociolinguistic factors into consideration in term creation and dictionary compilation.

- This presentation will deal with the following related socioterminological aspects:
  - Standardisation
  - Modernisation
  - Spelling and orthography
  - Harmonisation or unification
  - Taboo terms and *hlonipa/tlotta*
2. Standardisation

- Crystal (1985) defines *standardisation* as a natural development in a speech community of a standard language or an attempt by a community to impose one dialect as a standard.

- According to Hudson (1980) standardisation is a direct and deliberate intervention by society to create a standard language where before there were just ‘dialects’ (non-standard varieties).
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- Standard languages are usually associated with prestige and cut across regional differences, providing a **unified means of communication**.

- Standardisation is necessary to
  - facilitate **communication**, 
  - provide a **uniform form** for learning material and dictionaries, and
  - for the establishment of agreed **orthography and spelling rules**.
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- The standard language is an institutionalised norm which can be used in mass media, economic sector, education, science and technology:

  **Concept** | **Symbol** | **Linguistic representation**
  --- | --- | ---
  1 | Ⅰ i 1 | one, een, eins, uno, tee, nngwe, inye, ukunye
  2 | Ⅱ ii 2 | two, twee, zwei, duo, pedi, bobedi, isibini, isibili

- Standardised terms ensure exact communication among subject specialists themselves, but also between subject specialists and laypeople.
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- As such standards are important elements in the teaching and training of subject related topics.

- The initiation phase into any specialised field or domain goes through the learning of:
  - its main concepts,
  - the definitions describing these concepts, and
  - the terms denoting them.
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- Lexicographers, terminologists and terminographers work with standards – albeit the standard variety of a language or standards as such.

- Lexicographers document the vocabulary of a standard language.

- Terminographers document the (standardised) terminology of the standard variety of a language.
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- It is important for the terminologist to consult with other dialects or languages to see whether a concept is already named (UK *maize* / US *corn*).

- It is much easier to coin a new term in the relevant language according to existing terms in other language(s) (thermophile/termofiel/thermophil/termophile/termofilo/thermofiel/termopila).

- In other words, to make use of existing terms in the standard varieties of languages and their dialects by means of transliterations, borrowing or total embedding.
2. Standardisation (cont.)

- Terminologists document terminology with the aim of providing subject specialists and laypeople with standardised terms that denote the corresponding concepts.

- It is of the utmost importance to use standardised terms in subject related work.
  
  - **billion**: $10^9$ or $10^{12}$?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>English/German</th>
<th>American/French</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10^9$</td>
<td>milliard</td>
<td>billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10^{12}$</td>
<td><strong>billion</strong></td>
<td>trillion</td>
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The increasing use of non-standard language in the classroom often has dire consequences for learners and for the traditional language.

- *alimentary canal*
- *digestive tract*
- *gastrointestinal tract*
3. Modernisation

- No living language is static. A living language change and therefore it needs to be modernised.

- Language modernisation is a co-operative venture between government agencies (i.e. language bureaux) and the speakers of the language.

- Modernisation entails that the spelling and orthography rules of a language need to be revised on a regular basis.

- An orthography is to literacy what numeration is to numeracy (EN Emenanjo, 1998)
4. Spelling and orthography

- New and unified spelling and orthography systems should be created for the languages selected for standardisation.

- Establishing well standardised, efficient and practical spelling and orthography rules, is a crucial basis for developing a modern literacy tradition.
4. Spelling and orthography (cont.)

- An efficient and practical spelling and orthography is a direct function of enabling educational, cultural, administrative and mass media system in the countries concerned (Abdulaziz, 1991).

- Lexicographers and terminographers adhere to the spelling and orthography rules of the standard variety of a language when compiling dictionaries.
5. Harmonisation

- Nearly all the countries in the African continent are multilingual.

- This plethora of languages in a single country has posed formidable challenges to national development, national stability, socio-economic advancement, and sound educational policies.

- Multilingualism has a vital influence on the creation of polythematic terminology.
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- In language planning jargon, *harmonisation* is used synonymously with *unification* (Msimang, 1998).

- *(Unification) seeks to construct a common language for such a dialect-group by employing as much as possible, forms which are common to all of the variants in the group, and, where this is not possible, by the use of forms common to the predominant majority; or in previously-attained literary forms* (Lestrade, 1935)
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- South Africa has **eleven official languages:**
  - Afrikaans (af/afr)
  - English (en/eng)
  - Xitsonga (Tsonga) (tg/xtg)
  - Tshivenda (Venda) (ve/ven)

- **Three Sotho languages**
  - Setswana (Tswana) (tn/tn)
  - Sesotho sa Leboa (Northern Sotho) (ns/nso)
  - Sesotho (South Sotho) (st/sot)

- **Four Nguni Languages**
  - IsiZulu (Zulu) (zu/zul)
  - IsiXhosa (Xhosa) (xh/xho)
  - IsiNdebele (South Ndebele) (nd/nde)
  - Siswati (Swati) (ss/ssw)

- The **three Sotho languages** are mutually understandable as is the **four Nguni languages.**
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- In harmonisation a **number of dialects belonging to the same language group** are unified so as to produce **one common or standard language**.

- In this process **variant forms between dialects are neutralised or harmonised** in the **common or standard language** (e.g. Ngwato, Ngwaketsi, and Setswana to form **Standard Setswana**).

- The phenomenon of harmonisation can also occur **between languages** (e.g. IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, SiSwati, IsiNdebele). They too could be harmonised to produce **one common language** (e.g. **Standard Nguni**).
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- Nguni and Sotho cultural languages have a sizeable core of common vocabularies.
- It would be ideal if they also had a common pool of technical vocabularies.
- It will then not be necessary to coin a separate term for IsiNdebele, SiSwati, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu (Nguni group) or for Sesotho sa Leboa, Setswana, Sesotho (Sotho group).
- A team of terminologists for all the Nguni languages and another team for all the Sotho languages could work together when denoting concepts.
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- Terminology can be regarded as an artificial language.
- To introduce harmonisation/unification in the terminology process will not be a foreign principle or practice.
- Since terminology is mainly interested in written language the principles of harmonisation can be applied here (adhere to spelling and orthography rules of each language).
- Terms will be (inter)nationally recognisable – it will consist of the basic stem with language specific adjustments, but with the same or similar phonemic shape.
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

Harmonisation is closely related to standardisation.

By harmonising or unifying one is actually standardising:

- en law af wet tg nawu
- zu umthetho xh umthetho ss umtsetfo nd umthetho
- tn molao st molao ns molao ve mulayo

Standardisation and harmonisation both involve a direct and deliberate intervention by the linguistic society to create a neutral variety.
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- Harmonisation is a very **sensitive issue** in the South African context.

- **Linguistic** Nguni nationalism will not affect the **political status** of a distinct Ndebele nation, Swazi nation, Xhosa nation or Zulu nation. As will Sotho nationalism not affect the political status of a distinct South Sotho nation, Northern Sotho nation or Tswana nation.

- **Linguistic stakeholders** often fail to make a **distinction** between **linguistic nationalism** and **political nationalism**.
5. Harmonisation (cont.)

- With the South African multilingual dispensation the rapid development of the separate Nguni and Sotho languages is such as to make harmonisation no longer possible.

- The official South African languages are being developed into functional languages in all spheres of human activity.

- Terminology development could, however, benefit from harmonisation efforts.
5.1 Concept harmonisation:

- Activity aiming at the establishment of a correspondence between two or more closely related or overlapping concepts having professional, technical, scientific, social, economic, linguistic or cultural differences in order to eliminate or reduce differences between them (ISO 1087-1)

- **UK**: private school, public school
- **US, ZA**: public school, private school

- **en**: *raisin* (dried grape)
- **fr**: *raisin* (grape)
5.2 Concept system harmonisation:

- Activity aiming at the establishment of a correspondence between two or more closely related or overlapping concept systems having professional, technical, scientific, social, economic, linguistic or cultural differences in order to eliminate or reduce differences between them (ISO 1087-1):

- **en** wastewater  
  - domestic wastewater  
  - runoff water  
    - storm water  
    - rainwater  
  - industrial wastewater  
    - rinsing water  
    - cooling water  
    - industrial process wastewater

- **fr** eau usée  
  - eau usée domestique  
  - eau de ruissellement  
  - eau d’orage  
  - eau pluviale  
  - eau résiduaire industrielle  
  - eau de rinçage  
  - eau de refroidissement  
  - eau de fabrication
5.3 Term harmonisation:

- activity leading to

- the designation of one concept in different languages by terms that reflect the same or similar characteristics or have slightly different forms

  - en: ecology  
  - af: ekologie  
  - de: Oekologie  
  - fr: écologio  
  - it: écologia  
  - nl: ecologie

- or the establishment of the equivalence between two or more terms or the establishment of synonymy and term variation within a language (ISO 1087-1)
Correspondence between terms in one language:

- **Synonyms:**
  - amplitude reflection factor / voltage reflection coefficient
  - beeldradio / televisie

- **Geographical variants:**
  - UK lift / US elevator
  - UK pavement / US sidewalk
  - UK industrialised country / US industrialized country

- **Register (variants of different language level):**
  - myocardial infarction / heart attack
  - uterus / womb
5.4 Equivalence (ISO 1087-1: 2000 3.4.21)
Relation between designations in different languages representing the same concept:

- en: horse
- de: Pferd
- nl: paard
- af: perd
- fr: cheval
- es: caballo
- en: philosophy
- fr: philosophie
- es: filosofía
- af: filosofie
The terminologies of the official languages should be developed to enhance the multilingual heritage of a country.

When there are too many languages this might not be practical and economically viable.

In such a situation harmonisation could be beneficial to terminology.

The principles and practice of the harmonisation of terminologies should, however, be studied and applied carefully.
To me harmonisation seems to be a **natural process** – it should **not be enforced**.

**Language planners** should make linguists aware of a **phenomenon** such as harmonisation/unification.

They could advocate the **advantages** or **disadvantages** of such a phenomenon.

The test of harmonisation, however, lies with the **language users**.
On the one hand you have an awakening of linguistic nationalism – renewed pride, dignity and appreciation of the mother-tongue (first language).

On the other hand there is a disquieting movement towards the eradication of linguistic differences since they enshrine ethnicity which could be regarded as a stumbling block in the way of nation building (Louwrens 1996).

The terminologist cannot turn a blind eye to these developments, since whatever course the future is going to take, it will directly affect the work of the terminologist.
Irrespective of how well trained and resourceful terminologists may be, and irrespective of how elegant and sophisticated the set of terms they create, large scale term creation will remain a wasteful endeavour unless the end-product is going to be appreciated and utilised fully by the subject specialists and language practitioners – the end-users.

Appreciation for terminology should emanate from the language users themselves, since one can never succeed by forcing terminology, a language or language variety onto its speakers.
Harmonisation or unification means various things to various people, i.e.:

- the **merging** of a number of **dialects** to form a single common language;
- the **merging** of a number of **languages** belonging to the same group to form one standard variety;
- harmonising only **spelling and orthographies**;
- harmonising **scientific and technical terms** (language for special purposes).

The latter is the most desirable and achievable possibility.
6. Socioterminology: taboos

- The Afrikaans language creates typical Germanic terms or uses the principles of transliteration to coin new terms.
- The Afrikaans languages does not make use of euphemisms for sensitive concepts but will also not use offensive terms in subject related matter.
- In Afrikaans the Latin forms are being introduced as term equivalents (*i.e.* medical field).
The African languages prefer using euphemisms rather than coining transliterated terms.

Sensitivity is experienced regarding cultural habits, taboos and the so-called women’s language.

The term *hlonipa* is used in the Nguni languages and the term *tlotta* in the Sotho languages to indicate respectful language usage.
6. Socioterminology (cont.)

- Term creators should be very careful not to offend target users when dealing with culturally sensitive terms:

- **Taboo terms**: e.g. **bodily parts** *(anus, penis)*, **bodily functions** *(menstruation)*, **bodily actions** *(anal sex, oral sex, circumcision, masturbation)*, **bodily fluid** *(semen, faeces/excrement)* etc. are regarded as culturally sensitive and should be treated with respect when added in a terminology list.

- **Cultural sensitivity**: **traditional healer** *(person who uses traditional methods to treat sick people)* **NOT** **witch doctor, sorcerer**
6. Socioterminology (cont.)

- **Euphemisms**: usage thereof is culturally acceptable:
  - **male condom**: raincoat, sheath, French letter, sock; **Setswana**: sekausu
  - **prostitute**: commercial sex worker
  - **mistress**: roll on; **Northern Sotho**: tyatsi
  - **large penis**: forearm; **Northern Sotho**: tsogo la ngwana

- **Idioms**:
  - he was killed by *sweet potato*: he was killed by sex
Labels: The usage of labels assist the user when dealing with sensitive terms:

- **English:** penis
- **IsiNdebele:** ipipi (vulgar); umphambili (euphemism)
- **Sesotho:** ntoto (offensive)
- **Xitsonga:** xirho xa mbeleko xa xinuna (euphemism)

- **English:** vagina
- **Afrikaans:** vagina
- **IsiNdebele:** isifazi (euphemism)
- **Sesotho:** nnyo (taboo), setho sa bosadi (euphemism)
- **Tshivenda:** nnyo
- **Xitsonga:** xirho xa mbeleko xa xisati (euphemism), hlunu (taboo)

**NOTE:** What is regarded as offensive in Sesotho is not regarded as such in Tshivenda
6. Socioterminology (Cont.)

- Referral and cross referencing: User problems are minimised by cross referencing from a foreign, unknown or unfavourable term to a known or more acceptable term:
  - \(faeces\) → \(excrement\);
  - \(faeces\) → \(stool\)
  - \(pyrexia\) → \(fever\)

- Usage of common words in a technical dictionary: assistance is given to the general user:
  - \(vomit\) \((heave)\); \(womb\) \((uterus)\)
7. Conclusion

- **Standardisation** comprises a whole world of activities in various spheres of life which helps creating benefits and sustainability for everyone in the global society.

- The issue of standardisation of African languages over the whole African continent has been the central quest for the development of these languages as modern vehicles of science, technology, education, administration and literacy expansion.
The languages which have been selected as standards have already been committed to writing. There is an urgent need for modernisation and spelling and orthography reform.

Terminologies should be standardised and harmonised.

The problem associated with taboo or sensitive terms could be solved by using transliterations or euphemisms. What is regarded as offensive in one language may be a term commonly used in another culture.

The compiler of a term list should, however, be careful not to offend users by careless terminography.
Thank you!

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