

# Terminography vs. Lexicography Opposition Revisited

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Igor Kudashev

Palmenia Centre for Continuing Education, Kouvola

University of Helsinki

В 1970–1980-х гг. в ряде европейских стран возникло противопоставление терминографии и лексикографии. В данной статье рассматриваются история вопроса и его современное состояние. В странах, где сильны позиции центров технической терминологии, руководствующихся в своей деятельности стандартами ИСО, терминография в настоящее время превратилась в сложившуюся и довольно консервативную методологию создания нормативных терминологических словарей, ориентированных на специалистов-предметников. При этом методы терминографии не обязательно подходят для составления других типов словарей. Мы убеждены, что теоретических предпосылок для отделения терминографии от лексикографии не существует, а наилучших результатов при составлении терминологических словарей можно добиться, совмещая лексикографические и терминографические традиции с тщательным проектированием словарных продуктов.

**Keywords:** terminography, lexicography, terminological lexicography, specialised lexicography

## 1 Background

The opposition terminography versus lexicography seems to have appeared together with the term *terminography* which was introduced in 1975 in the ISO 1087 standard to replace the terms *terminological lexicography* and *special lexicography* (cf. Bergenholtz & Tarp 1995: 10; Humbley 1997: 14). It seems, however, that *terminography* was not supposed to be just a short form for *terminological lexicography*. R. Hartmann and G. James (1998: 139) explain in their "Dictionary of Lexicography" that the term *terminography* was coined on the analogy of lexicology:lexicography :: terminology:terminography. The primary aim of this term was to emphasize that lexicography should only deal with the description of the general vocabulary, whereas the description of terminology should be accounted for by another discipline (Burkhanov 1998: 240).

The opposition terminography versus lexicography was clearly stated in the works by G. Rondeau (1983) and F.W. Riggs (1989) in the 1980s. The demarcation between the two disciplines is usually considered to be based on the following criteria (Bergenholtz

& Tarp 1995: 10; Hartmann & James 1998: 139; Laurén, Myking & Picht 1998: 304–309, 343):

- Scope: technical terminology vs. general vocabulary
- Orientation of the compiler: onomasiological approach vs. semasiological approach
- Definition style: "encyclopaedic" (concept-based) vs. "linguistic" (term-based)
- Arrangement: thematic vs. alphabetical
- Target group: experts vs. general public
- Function: encoding vs. decoding
- Overall aim: standardization of terms vs. explanation of meanings.

These criteria have been criticised as relative and oversimplified by several authors, for example by H. Bergenholtz and S. Tarp (1995: 11) in their "Manual of Specialised Lexicography" and by I. Burkhanov (1995: 52–53) in his article "On the Disciplinary Status of Lexicography". H. Bergenholtz (1995) also attempted to reverse terminology's take-over bid by stating in one of his articles that terminography is actually the same as specialised lexicography and thus should be a part of lexicography by definition (Humbley 1997: 14).

## 2 Present state

Today, the opposition of the two disciplines still exists and is quite popular, as typing "terminography versus lexicography" in Google demonstrates. The geographical distribution of this popularity is quite uneven, though. J. Humbley (1997: 16) writes:

Terminology is practiced differently, and thus viewed differently from place to place: some language communities have not much gone in for terminology (the USA is a case in point), others, the French-speaking ones in particular, have so much more, and this affects the perception of what terminology is and how it relates to lexicography.

Another reason that seems to affect the perception of the relation between terminography and lexicography is the background of influential terminologists. For example, in Russia there are both terminological and lexicographical traditions but most terminologists are linguists, so to the best of my knowledge in the Russian language the term *terminography* (terminografiâ) is really considered just a short form for *terminological lexicography* (terminologičeskaâ leksikografiâ) and doesn't have any deeper meaning.

The situation is different in countries where the positions of centres for technical terminology have been traditionally strong. These centres have developed their own methods of compiling terminological glossaries which are mostly based on the ISO standards for terminological work (ISO 704:2000 being the most important). The original links of terminography (compilation of normative glossaries) with lexicology and lexicography have considerably weakened in the past forty years (Humbley 1997: 26).

But since many terminological dictionaries are compiled outside the centres for technical terminology, there are also other practices of terminological dictionary-making. As a result, the actual opposition we see today in many countries is terminography based on the principles of terminological work described in the ISO standards versus specialised lexicography based mostly on general lexicographical traditions (cf. Laurén, Myking & Picht 1998: 303–304). The term *terminography* is also often substituted with the term *terminology*.

### **3 Are there theoretical grounds to consider terminological dictionary-making a separate discipline?**

Let us forget for a while about the opposition between specialised lexicography and terminography and see if there are theoretical grounds to consider terminological dictionary-making and research a discipline separate from lexicography. Let's start with defining lexicography. For our purposes it can be defined as a branch of science which deals with presentation and description of lexical units of natural languages in the dictionaries. Thus, to compare terminological dictionary-making to lexicography we have to answer two questions: a) Are terminological collections dictionaries? b) Are terms and other special designations lexical units of natural languages?

#### **3.1 Are terminological collections dictionaries?**

Terminological collections are published under a whole bunch of names. S. Landau (2001: 35) quotes a medical lexicographer (Manuila 1981: 58) who says in despair:

Some of the names given to terminological reference works – particularly 'glossary', 'vocabulary' and 'dictionary' – have been so misused that there is complete confusion, and the title on the cover of a book is no safe guide to its contents.

In addition to the names mentioned there are also terminological standards, lexicons, term banks, etc.

In my opinion, one of the most acute problems in lexicography is that there is no strict and generally accepted definition of the term *dictionary* which would give a clear answer to the question whether dictionary-like reference works like terminological vocabularies, glossaries, term banks, etc. are actually dictionaries.

Referring to my PhD thesis (Kudashev 2007) I would suggest the following lexicographical definition of the term *dictionary* (simplified for the purposes of this paper):

An independent reference work, a part of another work, or a series of works providing data about (linguistic) signs arranged in a way that facilitates navigation and having the aim of helping (human) users in interpretation, usage or substitution of these signs.

If we accept this definition, we will notice that it covers the vast majority of existing terminological collections. Possible exceptions are terminological thesauri compiled by information science experts and used specifically for the purposes of information search.

### 3.2 Are terminological designations lexical units?

Languages for special purposes (LSPs) are generally viewed as functional variations of national languages and thus LSP designations also belong to the class of lexical units. As compared to the lexical units of the languages for general purposes (LGPs), LSP designations are much more often word combinations than words but this is partly a language-specific feature. In languages like German, Swedish or Finnish most LSP designations are words. Multi-word lexical units are not specific to LSPs either. In LGPs we can find such multi-word units as phrasal verbs, set collocations, idioms, standing expressions, etc.

Some LSP designations can be quite long (up to 10–12 words) and resemble definitions rather than terms. Their status as lexical units is questionable because it is hard for the language speakers to reproduce such units in the exact same form. However, similar problem concerns idioms, proverbs and other long LGP expressions. Besides, this problem is more of a theoretical than practical kind because statistically the length of 98–99% of terms does not exceed four words (Grinev 1995: 81).

Some LSPs include non-verbal and artificial symbols. These do not belong to lexical units but they usually have verbal counterparts and are included (or may be included) in LSP dictionaries as their synonyms.

Provided that the reader has agreed with our understanding of dictionaries and LSPs s/he will come to the conclusion that from the theoretical point of view most terminological collections should be considered dictionaries and that terminological dictionary-making belongs to the scope of lexicography.

It is natural for every lexicographical genre to have its own traditions, methodology and specific features. That is why there are historical lexicography, pedagogical lexicography, bilingual lexicography, slang lexicography, etc. What unites them (and terminological lexicography is not an exception here) is that they all deal with dictionary-making and dictionary research.

#### **4 Terminography is only one side of the story**

As mentioned above, in many European countries terminography may be described as methodology of recording the results of terminological work in the form of normative terminological glossaries. Terminography in its purest form is practised at the centres for technical and scientific terminology which have developed their own methods of terminological work and compilation of terminological glossaries based on the ISO standards.

To better understand the differences between terminography and (general and specialised) lexicography let's have a look at the following extract from the interview of Virpi Kalliokuusi (as quoted in Lammi 2005: 5, translation into English by myself) who had long been working in the Finnish Centre for Terminology (TSK) and then became a manager of general language dictionary projects in the Gummerus publishing house:

"The way of thinking, attitude towards designations and corresponding concepts are actually the same, although in terminology the concept is primary and the designation is thought of afterwards. In terminology normative aspect is very strong while dictionary work is mostly descriptive...", Kalliokuusi explains the relation between terminology and lexicography.

In some LSPs prescriptions (especially in the form of terminological standards) are of course much more binding than in LGP dictionaries but generally speaking almost every dictionary is viewed by the users as an authority and a referee in linguistic disputes (Gak 1977:12; cf. Zgusta 1971: 212; Varantola 2001: 219). The nature of large LGP dictionaries, for example academic ones, is mainly normative. However, the normative function is not always dominating in lexicography and sometimes it is not important at all.

At the same time, the main function of terminological glossaries is usually to standardize or provide binding recommendations about terminology. Terminography does not produce descriptive dictionaries or dictionaries for other purposes, for example pedagogical or historical.

Equally important is the fact that terminography focuses on the concepts while their linguistic designations are often left in the shadow. Although the ISO 12620:1999 standard describes a lot of linguistic categories, information on pronunciation, word-formation, inflection, syntactical valency and collocations, phraseology and usage can be rarely found in terminological glossaries. The main element of terminological glossaries are logical definitions which reflect the concept system. Terminography is so focused on concepts and concept systems that its essence would be described much more precisely by the term *conceptography*.

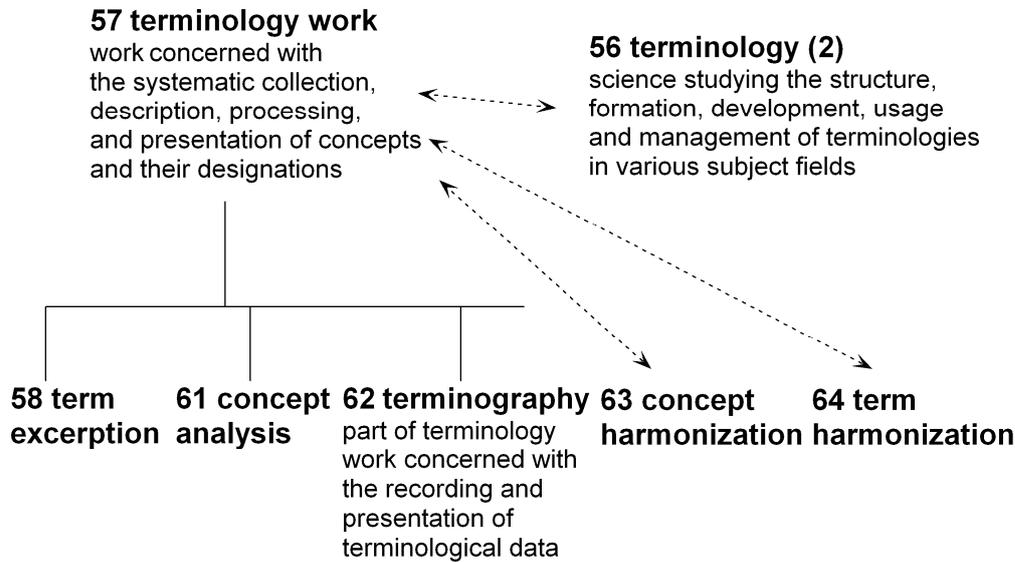
Does this mean that terminological glossaries are deficient in some way? From the point of view of laypeople like translators or students who need linguistic information about LSP designations to understand, produce and translate texts in LSP – most probably. But the main target group of terminological glossaries are LSP experts, so only their opinion really counts.

However, it is very important for people involved in terminological dictionary-making to realize that terminography is only *one way* of producing *certain kind* of terminological products for *certain purposes*. There are many types of dictionaries and terminological data which lie outside the scope of interest and/or methodological potential of terminography. Unfortunately people who are new to terminological dictionary-making are often overwhelmed by the authority of centres for technical terminology and ISO and they don't realize that every dictionary project is unique, so there is no universal methodology or set of data categories suitable for every dictionary. Thorough knowledge of both lexicographical and terminographical traditions and careful planning are the keys to compiling good terminological products.

### **5 Does terminography have nothing to research?**

Modern lexicography consists of two branches (Hartmann 2001: 4): a practical branch (dictionary making) and a theoretical branch (dictionary research). Dictionary research is concerned with the academic study of such topics as the nature, history, criticism, typology and use of dictionaries (Hartmann & James 1998: 43). At the same time, in terminological standards and manuals terminography is viewed as a part of terminological work, i.e. only as practical activities (see Chart 1).

The format of terminological glossaries hasn't changed for decades because glossary-making has been standardized. It is hard to believe though that this format is so perfect that no further research or improvement is needed. For example, H. Bergenholtz and S. Tarp (1995: 11) suggest that terminography has much to learn from the long lexicographical tradition in terms of preparing user-friendly products.



**Chart 1.** Terminography as seen in the ISO 1087-1 (2000) standard and TSK's Terminology of Terminology glossary (Terminologian sanasto 2006).

I would add that more research is needed on the classification and presentation of LSP designations other than classical terms. Here is a list of LSP designations which are almost never included into terminological glossaries:

- appellations and nomenclature (see Kudashev 2005)
- designations smaller than terms (term elements) and bigger than terms (set phrases)
- professional slang, vernacular
- verbs
- terms that have many interpretations, for example in different scientific traditions (so-called ambisemic terms – see Tatarinov 1996: 168–174)
- ambiguous LSP designations which refer to "rough notions" rather than strict concepts (so-called terminoids).

Describing concepts, terminography focuses almost exclusively on their logically essential characteristics, often ignoring pragmatically important characteristics, connotations, ideological components of meaning, etc. (Kudashev 2006).

Study of the nature of LSP designations belongs to the scope of terminology science but the ways of their presentation in the dictionaries have to be studied by LSP lexicographers or terminographers, regardless of the way they prefer to call themselves.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper, I've examined the history, the current state and some problems of the old opposition lexicography versus terminography. Terminography based on the ISO standards can be described as a methodology of compiling normative terminological glossaries with special domain experts as their primary target group. Terminography has achieved impressive results in concept analysis, presentation of concept relations, harmonization and standardization of concept systems and terminologies, so any compiler of a specialised or even a general language dictionary will certainly benefit from the methods developed in terminography. However, terminography may soon face stagnation if it further isolates itself from lexicography and neglects dictionary research. It is also very important for people who intend to start a dictionary project to be aware of the natural restrictions of terminography and understand the importance of careful planning and acquaintance with both terminographical and lexicographical traditions.

I believe that from the theoretical point of view most terminological collections should be considered dictionaries and that terminological dictionary-making belongs to the scope of lexicography. The theory and practice of LSP dictionary-making and the users of the dictionaries would definitely benefit if terminologists and lexicographers became more open-minded and joined their efforts to make better dictionaries.

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