Nuopponen Anita. *Multiple Goals of Teaching the Methods and Theory of Terminology*. A paper at the Conference "In the beginning was the term", Mons, Belgium, 24-25.10.1996.

Anita Nuopponen

Multiple Goals of Teaching the Methods and Theory of Terminology

1. Introduction

In this paper I want to discuss the benefits that terminology science may offer to different student groups by describing courses on offer in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Vaasa. Firstly, I shall look at the institutional and historical background of teaching terminology science at Vaasa; secondly, I shall give a short description of the courses we offer; and finally, I shall discuss the different goals according to the target groups.

2. Terminology education at the University of Vaasa

The term "terminology" will be used here to refer to terminology science, a field of study of terms and concepts, rather than a collection of term in a specific field. This is a necessary distinction because the Department of Communication Studies does not teach special languages (LSPs) or terminologies of specific fields, such as business, computer science etc. That is a task of the language departments and the Language Centre. We concentrate only on the theoretical and methodological part of LSP-studies. Our theoretical and methodological basis relies on the *General Theory of Terminology* of Eugen Wüster and the Nordic practice-oriented terminology work. They both emphasise the role of concepts and concept systems.

a) From business communication to translation

Terminology science was introduced at our University[1] at the end of the 1970's as an optional course in the study programme[2] of language-oriented business communication studies[3] just before the study programmes were reformed. Following that, in 1980, terminology science was integrated into the new translators' programme,

---

[1] Until 1980 the University was a School of Economics.
[2] "Study programme" or "degree programme" is used here to refer to a programme leading to a university degree.
[3] The graduates received a Bachelor's level degree called "Business Correspondents" with the possibility to continue to a Master of Science (Econ.)

which was started as the first Master's level[4] translators' programme in Finland. In 1985 a Senior Assistant in Applied Linguistics was employed to teach and to do research in the methods and theory of terminology. The purpose was to build up the curriculum and establish terminology science as a **minor subject**[5] for translation students. At first we offered only a couple of separate courses but in 1988 terminology science achieved its present status of a minor subject (see also 3. below).

b) From translation to communication sciences

In 1990 a new Master's degree programme in communication sciences[6] started in the Faculty of Humanities. It is an interdisciplinary programme covering studies in different fields including applied linguistics, terminology science, journalism, information sciences, multimedia and semiotics. As a result of this new programme, the Department of Communication Studies was established and the Senior Assistant was transferred to the new department together with a professor in Applied Linguistics, a new professor in Information Sciences as well as an assistant and several part time lecturers.

The Department of Communication Studies continues to have responsibility for the theoretical courses in linguistics, applied linguistics and terminology science. These courses are included not only in the study programmes of language students[7] but now also in the study programme of those majoring in communication sciences. In addition, we provide methodological support for graduate and postgraduate students from different language departments who are writing their theses on terminological subjects.

Students from the humanities, from business studies, social sciences or computer science can take communication sciences as a minor subject[8]. These courses also include an *Introduction to LSP* and *Terminology Research*.

---

[4] The study reform discontinued Bachelor's level degrees at the universities and extended studies in all fields to Master's level studies of a minimum of 5 years. It is only recently that the possibility to take a Bachelor's degree has been restored, but it is not an obligatory phase of the studies, the main goal still being the Master's degree.

[5] A Master's level degree programme consists of a **main subject**, two **minor subjects**, as well as general studies and elective studies. The total number of credits has varied over the years and according to the field of study, but a whole degree in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Vaasa in 1996 consists of 160 credits: the main subject accounting for 80, minor subjects 2x20 or 1x40, general studies 20 and electives 20 credits. These components each consist of several **courses** giving 1 to 10 credits (the average value per course is about 2 credits).

[6] The plural form "communication sciences" is used to emphasise the transdisciplinary nature of the study of communication. In most other contexts "communication science" is used to refer solely to mass communication studies.

[7] Today, there are no explicit "translator's programmes" any more in the Faculty, but the students of the language departments have a possibility to choose between e.g. translation, interpretation and cultural studies.

[8] 20 or 40 credits.

c) From communication to multimedia

During the last years the multimedia, hypermedia and computer-mediated communication component of the communication studies programme has been developed by adding such optional or alternative courses as graphic design, audio- and picture processing etc. We finally combined all the existing and new courses to form a minor subject. It has become very popular with students from languages, computer science, marketing and other departments across the whole university. Again, a course in terminological methods (either *Introduction to terminology research* or *Concept analysis*) was included as a part of this minor subject. (I shall return to the reasons later on). We launched this minor subject as a whole in the first instance in the Continuing Education Centre as a three-semester open university course[9], and then gradually integrated it into our regular curriculum. The terminological part has received very good feedback specially from the mature students in the open university courses.

d) From multimedia to technical communication

This autumn we started a new multidisciplinary Master's degree programme *Multimedia Systems and Technical Communication* together with the Department of Computer Science and Production Economy. Terminology science will be included as a part of the new programme, which has its origin in our joint projects with industry. It is a unique programme in Finland because students from two departments in two different faculties follow a joint 5-6 years-programme from the very beginning. Communication sciences and computer science contribute equally to the major subject[10] on the programme.

Another important offshoot from the projects is a *Professional Development Programme* for those who are already working with technical documentation. This programme was planned together with companies, e.g. Nokia Telecommunications and ABB, in order to fill the urgent need for well-educated documentation professionals. The programme is organised together with the Continuing Education Centre at Vaasa[11]. These two programmes are the only ones in Finland providing training for technical communication professions at university level.

---

[9] In Finland "open university" means that anybody can participate and pass university level courses without having to pass the entrance tests that are required for those who want to join a degree programme. Open university courses are organised both by the continuing education centres of the universities and the summer universities. The courses are normally held separately from the degree programme courses, but they have the same requirements and often the same teachers.

[10] The major subject accounting for 80 consists of studies in communication sciences (30 credits) and in computer science (30 credits), and theses (20 credits). The rest of the degree (80 credits) is decided by the student's own department and faculty.

[11] In contrast to the open university courses, this programme requires a good level of background education.

3. Terminology courses

As we have seen, there are many different target groups to take into account when teaching terminology science. Before discussing its role in the programmes outlined in the previous section, I would like give a brief description of our regular terminology courses.

Introductory courses in *LSP research* and *terminological research* (2 credits[12] each) are included in most of the programmes in our faculty. They also form prerequisites for taking terminology science as a minor subject, which starts with courses in *Terminological Lexicography* (2 credits) and *Concept analysis* (2 credits). *Concept Analysis* is also included in other programmes, such as *Multimedia Communication*. In order to take account of the needs of future translators, terminologists and technical communicators courses are provided in *The classical languages and term formation* (2 credits), *Term banks* (2 credits), and a *Terminological project* (5 credits).

For those who wish to take the whole minor subject or to write their master's thesis on a terminological subject, the following courses are available: *Advanced course in terminological research* (2 credits), and *Seminar on terminology science* (5 credits).

In addition, practical training may be included. Every year at least one professional placement in terminology is available at the Finnish Centre for Technical Terminology as well as at the Committee for Administrative Terminology at the Prime Minister's Office in Helsinki. In addition, we have terminology placements in our documentation projects with the companies in Vaasa. In addition, we are customising the regular courses to suit different target groups for the Continuing Education Centre.

4. Integrating terminology science into different study programmes: target groups and aims

It is a challenge to include subject matter that is relevant at the same time to translation, interpretation and communication students. Also the students from marketing and computer science have their own needs as well as the mature students. Our solution has been to offer on one hand, courses that are on a general level, and on the other hand, specialised courses for certain target groups. It is only in continuing education that we are able to dedicate all the courses to a specific target group. The general courses have been evolving from translation-oriented towards knowledge analysis oriented syllabuses.

4.1 Translation and interpretation studies

Almost all the translation, interpretation and other language students take the *Introductory course in terminological research* in the first or second year of study.

---

[12] 1 credit = an average of 40 hours input of work by a student, including class hours and private study.

And about 8 to 10 language students continue with terminology science as a minor or a subsidiary subject. For these students we want to offer the possibility to learn among other things:

- to handle specialised terminology,
- to analyse and solve terminological problems,
- to communicate with specialists (project, placement),
- to create terminology (term formation),
- to be careful in trusting dictionaries (methods of terminography and lexicography),
- to create their own terminology data bases (term bank course), and
- to use computers (term banks, text processing).

As Sue Ellen Wright[13] expressed it in a seminar on terminology education, "few translators enjoy the luxury of relying on a terminologist, which means that they must be prepared to do their own terminology work". There are not many possibilities to become a terminologist in Finland, although some do exist, e.g. Nokia Telecommunications, Centre for Technical Terminology, the Prime Minister's Office and some others. Our students have been able to take advantage of professional placements in these organisations during the summers.

In order to improve their chances of working professionally in technical communication, we now provide the minor subject students with the possibility of substituting part of the theoretical studies with multimedia studies. This gives them a good chance to get acquainted with modern communication technology in the same way as the communication students. The minor subject students have been compiling vocabularies for companies for the WWW or other database systems as smaller projects.

4.2 Communication studies (communication sciences major)

Many of the communication students are heading for traditional media professions: journalism, PR, advertising, teaching, but also for the new media professions, such as multimedia authors, webmasters etc. Some of those who have received their Master's degree work as technical editors or writers. By teaching terminological methods we want these students to learn:

- to become aware of the difference between everyday language and special languages,
- to be more accurate with special terminologies and concepts than journalists usually are,
- principles to analyse unfamiliar subject fields, and
- to think systematically in order to be able to structure texts, hypertexts and other presentations.

---

[13] Wright, Sue Ellen (1993). Terminology Training Within a Market-Driven Context - An American Model. In: Terminology Science & Research, Journal of the International Institute for Terminology Research 1993, 4, no. 2, 67-73.

We recommend languages studies as minor subjects to these students. Many of them also spend a year studying abroad. Some of them take also terminology science as one of their minor subjects or choose some parts of it as electives.

4.3 Communication studies as a minor subject

For those taking communication sciences as their minor study, (i.e. students from business studies, computer science), the following learning objectives apply:

- to distinguish between everyday language and special languages,
- to become aware of the terminology of their own field,
- to become aware of the meaning of language as a tool, and
- to solve terminological problems.
- (See also below).

4.4 Multimedia communication

It is our aim that the students taking multimedia and hypermedia communication as a minor subject should learn the following from their study of terminological methods:

- to analyse the field they are working with,
- to structure knowledge and to map hypertext,
- to avoid illogical representations,
- to design data base structures,
- to use unambiguous expressions, and
- to use economical but expressive style.

4.5 Technical communication

As I mentioned earlier, the translation and communication students have the possibility of gearing their studies towards careers in technical communication. In our new study programme *Multimedia systems and technical communication,* we are combining several things in order to match more exactly the requirements for a technical communicator: communication studies, multimedia studies, computer science studies, project design, production technology, language studies and, finally, studies in terminology science. Here, the courses in terminology science provide the following additional objectives:

- to understand and to explain comprehensibly complex technical facts,
- to use graphical presentations for system structures
- to select the correct terminology,
- to develop terminology together with the product designers and others involved in product development,
- to communicate with different specialist groups (own projects), and.

- to understand: technical documentation, documentation systems and structured text (e.g. sgml-programming).

4.6 Studies in general

Courses in the theory and methods of terminology are also of general value for the students in their daily studies currently - not only in the far future. The students work every day with highly-specialised texts and terminology that they should understand and learn. They have to contrast theories, to find the common core, and to produce texts and other presentations of specialist knowledge, whether it is linguistics, media theory, marketing, computer science, or whatever. We recommend them to put their skills in terminological analysis into practice whenever they study for exams, write assignments, do their homework and write their thesis. As feedback we often receive very well-structured answers and papers which are in totally different fields and contexts from terminology science.

4.7 Continuing education

We have integrated one or more courses in terminology science into three different contexts in the Continuing Education Centre: two minor subjects (*Communication Sciences* and *Multimedia Communication*, 20 credits each) for the open university students and the above-mentioned *Professional Development Programme for Technical Writers* (40 credits). Much of what has been said in previous sections applies to all these courses. There are, however, some differences particularly with regard to the mature students.

The students in the PD programme already have a Master of Arts or an engineering degree and are working in technical communication professions ranging from technical translators to documentation managers. As one of the cornerstones of the programme terminological methods gives the students the possibility to reflect on and develop their own working methods. During the courses they are able to structure their own work routines and to apply terminological analysis as a natural part of these methods. This target group has no problems in understanding the theory, methods and the applications of terminology. For them it is more or less something that they have always known but not explicitly formalised. They are aware of communication problems but cannot always track them down to inconsistent terminology and fuzzy concept systems.

The terminology courses are also consistent with the aims of life-long learning. The mature students participate in open university courses because they need to strengthen their professional skills or to effect a career change[14]. For them it is important to learn methods of mastering changes in the work environment, e.g. those brought about by information technology. Terminological methods can offer them a way to understand

---

[14] The open university students do not necessarily have a university degree or even a lower qualification. Many of them have just finished school, but not yet found or been offered a place at a university or other educational institution.

structures of specialist knowledge and to adapt to new terminology and concepts more.

5. Concluding remarks

Our experience has shown that the theory of terminology can be applied to many purposes and taught with different goals in mind. It is, however, a challenge to have so many purposes and target groups, and the contents of the courses must be balanced accordingly. In order to conclude, I shall return to the title of this conference and try to summarise briefly why there was the term - or rather terminology science - in the beginning and how we are using it to serve industry and commerce.

It all started with the introduction of LSP research and terminology science at our university at the end of the 1979. This has resulted in several master's theses, licentiate theses and doctoral theses in terminological subjects. Many of the students work in technical communication professions. Several of those doing research in the field of terminology are employed in different jobs at the university and today some of us are in the Department of Communication Studies, where our combined interests in terminology, LSP, business communication and hypermedia have led us to joint projects with companies. This co-operation has brought us insights into the actual needs of industry and commerce, which has again led us to design new programmes, such as the *Professional Development Programme for technical writers* and the joint Master's programme *Multimedia systems and technical communication* together with the Department of Computer Science and Production Economy.

The PD programme gives us direct information from those who are actually doing the work which we hope several of our students will have one day. Thus we are making serious efforts to put terminology (science) at the service of industry and commerce by providing terminological training to many different target groups, from future translators to technical communicators, and from future marketing managers to systems analysts. LSP and terminology science, especially concept-oriented terminology, plays a central role in all of these developments.