

Introduction

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/tlrp.3.02int>

Pages xiii–xv of

Towards New Ways of Terminology Description: The sociocognitive approach

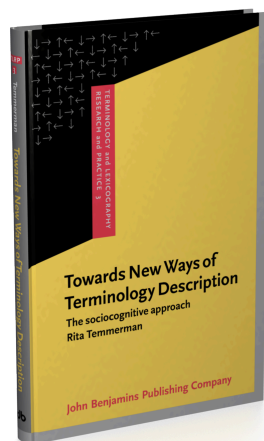
Rita Temmerman

[Terminology and Lexicography Research and Practice, 3]
2000. xv, 258 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Introduction

Contemporary novelist Jeanette Winterson's artistic motto "Not words for things but words which are living things with the power to move." summarises the main thesis of this work. This may seem paradoxical since we are not concerned with literary language but rather with the study of recent terminology in the specialist language of the life sciences (e.g. biology, genetics, microbiology, molecular genetics, genetic engineering, biochemistry, recombinant DNA technology, biotechnology, etc.) with the intention of questioning the principles and methods of traditional Terminology.¹ Winterson expresses how language functions for her as a novelist. She wants to explore the power of words, words which can do more than just stand for things, words which can "*move*". Words have the power to *move* in a more literal sense, i.e. to travel from here to there, from a speaker to one or many listeners, from a writer to one or many readers. But words also have the power to *move* figuratively. Firstly because the impact that words expressed by one language user can have on his audience slightly changes the world i.e. the *understanding* of the world is affected and as a consequence the world *is moving*, i.e. changing. Secondly, words can also *move* figuratively because of the role that words in language play in the understanding of the world by each individual. Language has a creative potential, in addition to its communicative and referential potential. Each individual can *move* from a state of inertia into a state of being, thanks to language. Thirdly, words can figuratively *move* a person emotionally. They do not only name objects or concepts objectively, they can also have connotations which may appeal to and have an impact on a person's subjective feelings. The power of words to move in these and other senses are self-evident for literary language which is general language. However, for special language, such as the language of the life sciences, the

1. The vocabulary of special language is *terminology* (lower case). The theory underlying and resulting from the study of *terminology* we refer to as *Terminology* (upper case).

expectation pattern tends to be that words should name well-defined concepts and that in scientific language the power of words to move is to be constrained. The expectation pattern concerning the strict and objective nature of the applied methods and the results obtained by science is supplemented by expectations about what scientific language should be like: concise, precise, to the point, with a specific *terminology*. Whereas a novelist like Winterson is expected to exploit the *power of words to move*, scientific language is expected to control it via terms. We attempt to explore some of the consequences of bringing the *power of words to move* to the discipline of Terminology.

Structure of this book

This work is structured as follows: in Chapter one the principles of traditional Terminology are discussed and a survey of new directions in the attempted scientific study of terminology is presented. In Chapter 2 we introduce aspects of the theoretical framework on whose basis we challenge the traditional credo of Terminology by doing an empirical study of terminology in the textual archives of the life sciences. In Chapters 3 to 5 the results of the empirical study are presented. In Chapter 3 we critically examine the concept of '*concept*' and the possibilities for meaning descriptions. It is suggested that terminologists start from *unit of understanding* instead of *concept* and that they replace and/or supplement the traditional definition by *templates of meaning description*. We take a semasiological approach to the studies of categories in the life sciences by starting from the terms that designate units of understanding and investigating how these units of understanding and their designations are defined and explained in texts. We show that most units of understanding have prototype structure and that units of understanding are experiential rather than objective. In Chapter 4 we explore the link between the structure of the understanding of a category and the process of lexicalisation. We argue that two counterbalancing forces are at work when categorisation takes place within a language community: on the one hand the urge for univocity, on the other hand the urge for diversification when attempting a better and broader understanding. In the principles for standardisation of traditional Terminology, the emphasis has been on the urge for univocity. In sociocognitive descriptive Terminology the functionality of polysemy and synonymy in special language will need to be studied in more detail. In

Chapter 5 we investigate the mechanisms behind the urge for better and new understanding. Our hypothesis is that these are in many cases related to and inspired by metaphorical reasoning. The metaphorical model is an underlying schema which is not fully expressed propositionally and lexically. We challenge the principle of traditional Terminology which claims that because unambiguous communication is the ideal for special language it is preferable to replace a metaphorical term by its literal equivalent. We show how in the life sciences the gestalt-like metaphorical model which is at the basis of better understanding and new discovery plays an important role in texts which treat the same and related subjects. Therefore, instead of promoting the curtailing of metaphorical language in scientific discourse, as the principles of traditional Terminology suggest, one might even consider encouraging metaphor for the sake of progress of understanding. We show that in order to facilitate the understanding of terms, Terminology might want to establish guidelines for the description of metaphorical models. In the final chapter we show how the methods and principles of *sociocognitive Terminology* are applicable in terminography and how they can offer solutions for a number of problems in the traditional approach.