

Vision and Terminology Policy

Bassey E. Antia

Although the concept of a terminology policy is gaining currency, the role and applications of terminology in many environments continue to be rather limited. This piece uses a strategic management framework to suggest that this is so because the directive principles or visions in institutional terminology policies are shaped by the management stage at which terminology is allowed a voice. The article suggests some of what needs to happen if the buzzword “terminology policy” is to really herald a new era for terminology.

Schlagwörter

Terminology, strategic management, vision, operative instrument

Introduction: terminology policy in a strategic management context

Policy-making seeks to develop a vision against the backdrop of an environmental scan of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), then converts this vision into actions or programmes intended to produce measurable outcomes [1]. Indeed, depending on whether it is a mere vision statement or an extended

document, a policy may mirror the initial phase or all of the phases in figure 1, which is one conceptualization of the strategic management process.

Stage one is central to this discussion, as it is concerned with outlining a vision, that is, the philosophy, directive principles or objectives of an institution. The complexity of most environments is such that a top level, organization-wide strategic process such as in figure 1 is ideally replicated at the level of constituent units

and sub-units. The result would typically be a multi-tiered but well aligned strategic management structure. Figure 2 illustrates this structure at two levels (organization-wide and subordinate-coordinate units).

Range of visions in a terminology policy

In the strategic management context, a terminology policy may be seen as outlining a vision and a set of instruments for:

- (a) fostering the optimal and rational use of a language’s referential resources in order to support specialized communication, and
- (b) managing the intellectual and other proprietary assets of an organization/community in order to advance given goals.

This characterization implies that vision in terminology policy-making may be directed not only at efficiency and effectiveness of special-purpose communication, but also at a range of added-value goals dealing with knowledge. A terminology policy in the strategic management sense also implies that terminology attempts to communicate an overarching vision which then motivates the activities in phases 2 – 5 of figure 1.

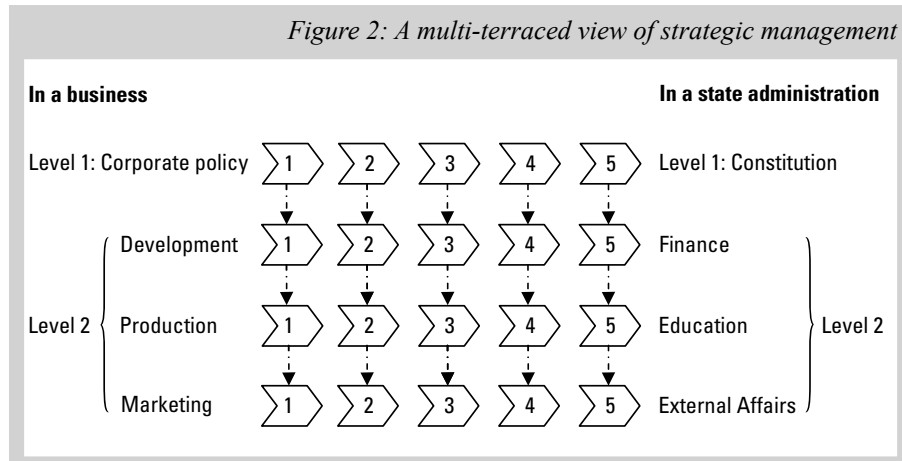
Where do such terminology policies exist?

Thanks to media sensationalization of the French (Toubon Law) of 1994, we often cite France as a country that possesses something close to an explicit, intersectoral, terminology policy – by which we sarcastically mean Anglophobia. However, we have difficulties pointing to high profile (state) policies elsewhere, even in places where a lot of terminology activity is ongoing. What is the terminology policy of Germany? Company X? University (Faculty) Y? It is doubtful that a straightforward answer can be given. Should the vision of a terminol-



Figure 1: Strategic Management Process (cf. Ziegele [2]). [Legend: 1=directive or guiding principles; 2=the vision placed in the context of a SWOT analysis; 3=specific objectives and plans for realizing them; 4=activities in aid of implementation; 5=indicators of success. The process is cyclical and allows for formative evaluation.]

Figure 2: A multi-terraced view of strategic management



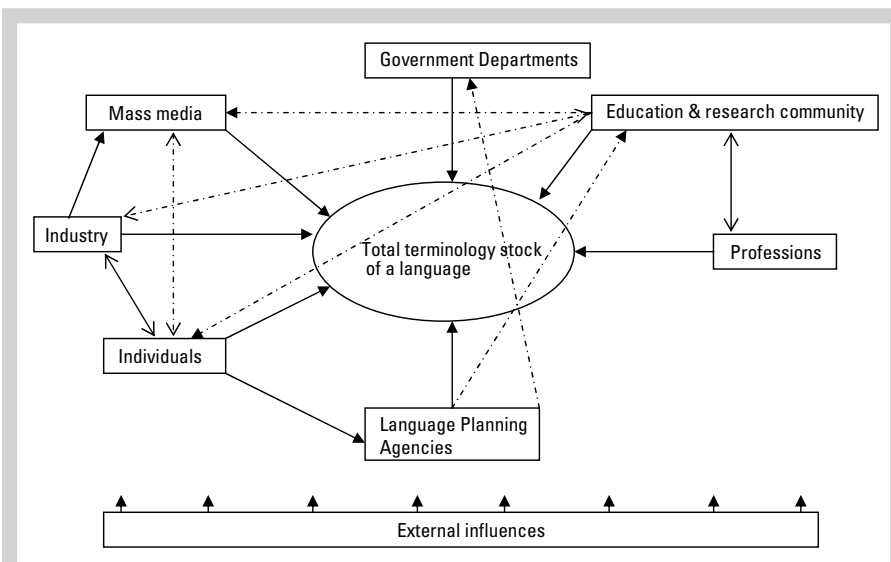


Figure 3: Some sources and routes for the enrichment of a terminology stock
[Note: Broken lines are used only when lines cross path].

ogy policy be reduced to a code of verbal conduct in authoring, in an emergency, in marketing, or a set of best practices in creating and compiling terms? Couldn't an organization's vision of terminology integrate all of these and more?

While they are or have been countries/regions and corporations with terminology policies or practices motivated by a broad vision and characterized by an intersectoral reach (e.g. France, Québec/Canada, Catalonia/Spain, Ireland, South Africa, Norwegian State Oil Corporation), it does seem that these are more of an exception rather than the norm. Perhaps no more than a handful of the 192 member states of the United Nations would qualify for certification indicating that they possessed a terminology policy.

Generally, it is the case that terminological interventions are motivated by a range of disparate, uncoordinated visions related to: safety, brand image, national identity, education, etc. Even in this rather disjointed policy environment, terminology is not infrequently an afterthought. Consider the following decision-making chain in Nigeria as it relates to terminology in education:

1. 1979 Constitution provides for equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels
2. National policy on Education, amended 1981, provides for the indigenization of the language of the school curriculum at specific levels, and for the teaching of Nigerian languages
3. Federal Ministry of Education, as implementer, enlists the support of

higher education institutions in the training of manpower to teach in Nigerian languages

4. Help! We need Terminology!
5. National Education Research and Development Center, a unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, funds local language metalanguage projects, that is, terminologies for linguistic description.

Two points seem obvious from this rather typical scenario. Firstly, the range of interventions that a broad terminology vision can inspire is often not taken into account at upper (strategic) management levels (that is, level 1 of figure 2). Secondly, at lower tiers (e.g. level 2 of figure 2) the place of terminology tends to be in the operative instrument phase, not in the vision development phase.

The problem of a subsidiary warrant for terminology

What's wrong with terminology, in an anthropomorphic sense, not sitting at the policy formulation table of level 1 or 2, along with education, diplomacy, health, finance (in a country), or with development, production, marketing (in a corporation)?

Firstly, terminological interventions become vertical rather than horizontal. Because the authorization is given by a principal who most probably is driven by the need to meet narrowly defined benchmarks, terminological interventions in subsidiary warrant environments are unable to address the system linkages that are so essential for sustainable success. To illustrate the foregoing, figure 3

attempts to show sources for the enrichment of the terminology stock of a language (that is, all the LSP terminologies), and some of the possible routes (direct and indirect) through which items get into the general stock.

As figure 3 shows, the education and research community contributes terminologies not only directly, but also through mediated sources like the mass media, industry, influential individuals, etc. By the same token, this community can itself be influenced by professions, industry, etc. Figure 3 thus reflects some of the kinds of linkages that may exist in the terminologies of a given language at a national level; it suggests the limited usefulness of a vertical and ad-hoc approach to terminology; and it indicates the desirability of some measure of coordination. An analogy in the software localization industry would be situations where terminology is not used consistently across application zones (dialogue boxes, menus, strings) or across user interface, online help, documentation, website and collateral materials. In environments where this is no longer an issue, terminology typically has pride of place in the workflow.

The second problem associated with a low level warrant for terminology is that this form of authorization tends to reduce terminological practice to reactive, problem-fixing intervention. As a result, the 1-10-100 logic is lost, according to which it costs one unit of currency to prevent a problem, ten to detect the problem during design, and a hundred to solve it in the end product. In corporations, terminology typically intervenes downstream when document version update practices are seen as having become costly liabilities – in an age where product liability extends to the quality of documentation; or when errors from translation suppliers become so costly that it is seen to make sense to invest in the development of such aids as product ontologies. At a supra state level, it is instructive that it has taken some seven-odd years after the launching of the Bologna Process – intended to foster comparability and readability of European higher education qualifications – for us to witness a flurry of activities on the terminology of higher education and of relevant quality assurance mechanisms [3].

The third problem with a secondary warranting system is that it limits the scope of what terminology can offer. When terminology, for instance, derives its

Potential vision areas	What problem is relevant here? What can go wrong if vision area is not (well) attended to?	What vision statements can be developed?
1. Communication & terminology management, e.g. – Creation of terms – Collation of terms/evaluation – Database maintenance – Concept modeling – Cooperation, harmonization, standardization – Term use	Wrong use of term; inappropriate neology; non-functional ambiguity, vagueness; misunderstanding among groups/teams; effort/time in finding right term to use; etc	<p>To manage terminology resources efficiently and effectively in order to optimize communication and {create seamless workflows in our organization}/{facilitate cooperation in our language community}.</p> <p>To leverage on terminological knowledge and resources to evolve innovative products and value-added services that exceed the expectations of our {clientèle} {principals} and advance our organization's goals.</p>
2. Workflows	time/effort expended in retrieving items/information	
3. Knowledge pursuits (representation, modeling, inferencing, discovery, etc.)	terms can negatively impact: understanding, representing, accessing, communicating (new) knowledge; they can also adversely affect processes of knowledge management in an organization, e.g. learning curve for new employees	
4. Assets (intellectual or material, financial, loyalty, image)	absence of ontologies of an organization's products; negative effects on external/marketing communications, brand image, client relationship capital; untapped revenues or capital of goodwill from possible sale/distribution of terminologies, etc.	

Table 1: Worksheet for developing vision

warrant from an educational policy, decision-makers narrowly view it as serving as the basis for indigenizing the school curriculum. It is typically assumed that the mere fact of a local language science curriculum enhances learning. Elsewhere, this rather narrow view has been critiqued; it has been suggested that terminology offers other resources that address a range of documented difficulties associated with learning science [4]. The sum of knowledge in terminology related to the structure of compound terms, frequencies of terms, concept relations, synonymy management, definitions, for instance, speak quite readily to some of the challenges of learning science, and can be operationalized as scientific metalanguage in the classroom. The problem of course is that curricula and lesson plans are tightly regulated at policy-formulation levels where the terminology vision is absent.

Similarly, when in corporate environments terminology derives its warrant exclusively from the documentation unit, the potentials of terminology remain untapped in otherwise needy areas. For instance, in warehouse or spare parts administration, storing items according to ontical relations may allow for more efficiency than alphabetical ordering. In sales

and support, it may make sense to manage not just proprietary terms for your organization's products, but also terms that are used industry-wide or by your rivals for identical/compatible products. A client of your competitor who contacts your organization about availability of an item (referred to by your competitor's proprietary label) can only be served (and money can only be made for you) if your sales people manage synonymy.

What needs to happen?

If it is to fundamentally redress the oft-concealed status of the profession, a terminology policy should aspire to a position that overarches the departments of a business or of state administration. A terminology policy must seek to move terminological interventions away from their almost exclusive status as operative instruments, to a position where terminology is a co-repository and co-communicator of vision. In some instances, this new position may amount to a paradigm reversal of some sort, in which education, external affairs, or production and marketing – auspices that previously provided the warrants for terminology – become operative mechanisms for a relevant terminology vision.

Transiting from terminology advocacy to policy

In-house, terminology advocacy might find it helpful to attend to a number of preparatory tasks. Firstly, as an exercise in applied strategic management, it would seem important to attend to the development of terminology-supported visions that are consistent with, and seek to extend, traditional objectives in both state administration and corporate governance. Based on an extensible set of vision areas, Table 1 suggests how (for groups of vision areas) directive principles may be developed.

Table 1 shows that besides the obvious area of managing terminology to support specialized communication, vision can be directed at work processes, asset management and a range of knowledge pursuits. With respect to the latter, the example of what terminology can offer to education was cited earlier. One might also look at the social science tradition of content analysis, particularly in the mid Cold War years, to see how terminology can easily be called to do duty in the area of intelligence gathering. Content analysis is a method for systematically drawing inferences from text collections (e.g. newspapers), and

Constitutional objectives	Examples of how terminology can further these objectives?
"19. The foreign policy objectives shall be -	
(a) promotion and protection of the national interest;	Terminological analysis of the international press for intelligence gathering.
(b) promotion of African integration and support for African unity;	Building/demonstration of shared local knowledge ontologies in different countries on the continent.
(c) promotion of international co-operation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations;	Harmonization of concepts/terms relevant to a given domain as basis for cross-border cooperation.
(d) respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and	A term base in support of the drafting of bilateral and multilateral instruments.
(e) promotion of a just world economic order."	Terminological evidence generated from texts indicating unfair trade practices. Interesting evidence could relate to the double-speak: free trade and trade protectionism.
Can terminology offer more?	
Speed training at foreign service academy where career and non-career diplomats are trained.	

Table 2: Terminology and foreign policy objectives

word frequency analysis is quite important in this method.

Table 2 provides another view on the foregoing by demonstrating the relevance of terminological knowledge at a specific, domain level: the foreign policy objectives in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Obviously, the foreign policy objectives stated in Table 2 are not incompatible with what terminological knowledge can offer. The fact that there is more that terminology can offer underscores the need for terminology to aspire to some agenda-setting position. In effect, exploring applications of terminology in a number of specific environments might ultimately help the cause of terminology as a strategic management policy.

The second point terminology advocacy needs to address is the view that policy-making or the situations it seeks to address may be underpinned by rationales that defy the logic that comes with academic socialization into terminology. Advocates may be convinced about certain visions, e.g. the benefits of using the mother tongue, ordering knowledge, etc. Yet, reception accorded these lofty ideals may be quite cold because targeted groups have other competing considerations. It therefore becomes important

for terminology advocacy to familiarize itself with a range of ethnographic and environmental assessment tools that are critical to understanding the *Logik des Bodens*. Let's illustrate. Until the early 1980s, the higher echelons in Norway's then nascent oil industry were American and naturally spoke English. A perceived threat to Norwegian led political authorities to initiate a norwegianization project ahead of the commencement of operations on a new drilling platform. Norwegian was to be the working language on this platform [5]. Today, although a Norwegian oil terminology exists and is being used in the media and in education, the uptake in the oil industry and the expected decline in the use of English have not turned out as anticipated. In hindsight, policy-making did not reckon that the need for professional identity among oil workers (guaranteed by English) could turn out to be something of a counterweight to the indigenization of oil terminology.

Thirdly, as a result of the competencies required by strategic management and the arbitrary and capricious environment of policy-making, it may be worthwhile to rethink the structure of terminology education. Clearly, vision development for terminology as a strategic manage-

ment policy tool requires a broad-based social science background that allows relevant and potential system linkages to be conceptualized. By the same token, it would seem worthwhile exploring how some tuition in terminology could be offered in management education as a means of broadening the base of manager-advocates of terminology-inspired visions.

Conclusion

In sum, if current discourses on terminology policy are to really make a dent, the aspiration should be to evolve strategies for moving terminology away from an exclusive operative instrument position to a vision-setting point. It is in such a position that advantage can be most taken of all that terminology can offer communities (corporate, national or regional).

Literatur

- [1] U.K. Cabinet Office, Strategic Management Team (1999): Professional policy making for the twenty first century. <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/profpolicymaking.pdf> (Accessed August 18, 2007).
- [2] Ziegele, F. (2007): Strategic and operative management. International Deans' Course. Fachhochschule Osnabrück, May & September, 2007.
- [3] Crozier, F., Curvale, B., Dearlove, R., Helle, E., Hénard, F. (2006): Terminology of quality assurance: towards shared European values? Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- [4] Antia, B.E. & Kamai, R. (2006): African issues in terminology: an educational perspective. In: Picht, Heribert (ed.): Modern Approaches to Terminological Theories and Applications. Bern: Peter Lang, 135-152.
- [5] Rangnes, O.K. (1997): The mother tongue as a threat to professional identity: Norwegian oil workers' attitudes to Norwegian oil terminology. Norsk termbank, Universitetet i Bergen (småskrifter Nr. 21, 1997).

Prof. Dr. **Bassey E. Antia** teaches at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. He has authored *Terminology & Language Planning* and edited *Indeterminacy in Terminology & LSP*, both from Benjamins publishers. Presently, he is an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow in the Department of International Public Health, University of Bielefeld.



Kontaktadresse

Universität Bielefeld
Fakultät für Gesundheitswissenschaften
Epidemiologie und International Public Health
bantia1@yahoo.co.uk