

The Role of the Term

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Abstract

This presentation will explore the term-concept relationship that comes into play in the production of specialized discourse and in the translation of texts as opposed to the one that comes into play in the production of information resources such as thesauri and taxonomies. Specifically, I will focus on the different roles assumed by the term in these two different contexts.

By way of introduction I will review some of its key concepts, i.e., object, intension, extension used in standard ISO704. This will be followed by a discussion of the concept of “specialized knowledge”.

An analytical framework that consists of reviewing the process of concept selection and term selection will be used to examine the process of producing specialized discourse. The framework comprises four quadrants: two pertaining to the realm of the potential and two pertaining to the actualization. Examples of an object will be used to illustrate the passage from the potential conceptualizations to the actual and from the potential verbalizations to the actual term selection. The examples will show that the role of the term is to communicate the concept by representing the referent (i.e., the object(s) in the extension of the concept we are talking about in the text).

This same framework can be applied when providing a translation solution (equivalent term in a target language). Once the referent in the source language is clearly understood and the subject of the text is known, the same process of concept selection and term selection in the target language can be followed. There is no need to analyse the entire extension of the concept in the source and target language.

With respect to information resources, I will demonstrate that developing information resource tools is comparable to the task of writing definitions as outlined in ISO 704. Whether one is writing a definition or selecting a term for inclusion in an information resource, there is no referent as in the production of discourse. The process of term selection requires circumscribing the extension (all the objects that make up the concept) and intension and mapping the concept system and the relationships between related concepts. The role of the term is to represent our understanding of the concept by acting as the synthesis of the definition.

In conclusion, the role of a term in specialized discourse or its translation is to represent the concept whose extension includes the referent while the role of the term in an information tool is to act as a definition of the concept so as to be able to use it to tag information context.