

## EAFT SUMMIT November 2006

As the primary reason why I stand here today is historic – I was one among several founders of the European Association for Terminology in 1996 – I will also approach the theme: **The Terminologist in Profile** from a historic point of view. My small contribution has furthermore been discussed among the participants in a Nordic initiative on a Masters program in terminology, called TERMdist.

If I look back to the 1980s when terminology became the specific topic of conferences and seminars, the content of these were very much the discussions of the theoretical foundation and the subject matters to include in terminology work - so focus was on

- Which theoretical schools could be applied
- What characterizes terminology – what are its special traits?
- How could linguistic information be represented
- How could the new information technology be used, especially to build term banks
- What was to be taught to coming terminologists

Towards the end of the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s we see the first attempts to go beyond these initial steps to establish a new scientific research area and look at the environment of which terminology and terminologists can form part. The focus here was primarily on private enterprises, although governmental bodies often had and have the same needs:

- Terminology as a **production factor**, that is as a resource used to create value and economic performance in the production of goods and services.
- Terminology as an **economic factor**, that is terminology transformed into a cost-effective instrument.

- Terminology as a **distinctive competency**, that is as a strategic element to be incorporated into products so as to increase the penetration into the desired markets. In regard to terminology certainly both **quality and price** would be clear distinctive competencies

Towards the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century there is a stronger focus on technological aspects - language technology as well as other technologies - and the interface between man and machine. At the same time there is a need to look closer at the synergies with other knowledge areas:

- Corpus construction for term candidate extraction and identification of relations between terminological units
- Ontologies
- The role of terminology in information structuring, information retrieval and knowledge management
- Information Maps and Topic Maps for knowledge design and dissemination
- The increased digitalization of language for specific purposes and its potential

This - often within a specific domain: law enforcement, classical music, fishing industry, health sector, transportation, software localization, tourism, environmental policy, public administration – just to mention a few of the topics I have found treated over the past decade from some terminological point of view.

Today I participate as one of the Danish representatives in a Nordic initiative to define the curriculum of a Master Degree in terminology, pooling the many resources of the Nordic countries.

**What are we finding?**

In TERMdist we have made an analysis of job ads across the Nordic countries in which “terminology” or “concept definition and delimitation” is mentioned (I have made copies of one ad for your information). There are not many and they are primarily ads by public institutions.

Some of the key words mentioned:

- Delimitation of concepts
- Term definition
- Classification
- Databases
- Participation in and management of projects

In order to fulfill these functions the requirements mentioned are:

- Academic background in linguistics / terminology / semantics / classification
- Analytical and systematic
- Project management skills
- Well organized / able to meet deadlines
- Communication skills
- Able to cooperate with others / teamwork
- Knowledge of the Microsoft Office package

In the cases where terminology is mentioned in ads by private enterprises the companies are characterized by a very high consciousness as to the need for defining concepts and terminology, e.g. Microsoft. The lack of ads by private enterprises in which “terminology” or related terms are used can PROBABLY be ascribed to the fact that in many private enterprises the terminology function is part of either a translation section or a communication department. Thus, they are advertising for other profiles like e.g. translators.

It is clear from the ads that besides the professional requirements in linguistics / terminology / semantics or classification it is absolutely necessary to look at issues like project management in a limited time frame and other aspects of management like capacity planning, employee motivation and quality assurance.

What I have mentioned until now is a very short and rapid summary of the status quo. The important thing in the future is the analysis of experiences gained over the years combined with innovative thinking. And to that purpose the questions posed by the organizing committee for this theme – projected into the future - are:

- What profiles are at our disposal? Are they sufficient? What could we imagine knowing what we know?
- Which new skills are desirable? Should they be included in training courses and in which form?
- How is the terminologist recruited? And how will he or she be recruited in the future?
- What is the professional status of the terminologist? Can or should it be changed?

The papers introduced in this Round Table will do exactly that – analyze and project.