SOME ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN TERMINOGRAPHY: CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: While studying the state of contemporary Latvian terminography, it must be acknowledged that terminological dictionaries are issued very often. The present research examines 450 Latvian terminological dictionaries that have been published in the last 30 years. Terminological dictionaries represent 30–40 % of the entire Latvian lexicography. Their characterization has a wide variety, both in terms of the authors and publishers, in terms of language selection and in terms of target audience. In addition, there are dictionaries approved by the Terminology Commission and dictionaries that are not approved by any official institutions. There is a lack of studies on the habits and needs of term dictionary users. In addition, publications of criticism or analysis about the qualitative performance of such dictionaries are also rare and no criteria has been developed to fully analyse and evaluate the development of terminology's theory and practice. In this article, the authors have focused on exploring the situation in order to clarify the main trends in the characteristics of the terminography of Latvia. This was done through interviews with representatives of leading publishers who confirmed that the publishing houses are losing interest in issuing terminological dictionaries and discussion with the Chairman of the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. The authors have identified the main issues in organising the terminology process and determined answers to specific questions: what determines the dictionaries' choice and credibility factor; how is feedback sought after a new dictionary is issued; what alternatives exist in areas where terminological dictionaries have been missing for decades, etc. Finally, the study analyses the new Latvian National Terminology Portal, which has been in operation for two years, with an aim to provide information on terms and to allow everyone to participate in the process of creating new terms.

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Introduction

The dictionary is an authoritative and accurate source of information. Dictionary users generally consider it particularly significant and reliable during any research process. Terminological dictionaries play an important role throughout the diversity of dictionaries, because terminology creates the scientific foundation in every language. Any scientific text is composed of approximately 15–20 % of terms (Scientific Writing, 2018, p. 25), it can therefore be said that the use of unified and accurate terminology in any field ensures scientific quality and transparency of the conceptual system.

Given the diversity of content and form of contemporary dictionaries, it is not always clear whether each lexicographical publication pertains to terminography. Nowadays there is no well-defined understanding of which dictionaries are classified as terminological dictionaries or is text arrangement in entries still considered the main criterion. There are no certain principles for identifying terminological dictionaries (or dictionaries in general), the boundaries of dictionary typology are not distinct, so studies more and more often refer to them as terminological editions, not terminological dictionaries.

At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, within 20 years over six hundred and sixty dictionaries (Šmite, 2012) have been added to the Latvian lexicography, of which several hundred are terminological dictionaries. The production and publishing of terminological dictionaries in the Latvian lexicography makes up a large proportion – approximately 30 % of all published dictionaries. Other sources of information show that the ratio of terminological dictionaries to the total volume of dictionaries is even higher (see Bibliographical indicator, 1995). In particular, since 1991, i.e. after the restoration of independence of Latvia, there has been a significant increase in the number of terminological resources. The present research examines 450 Latvian terminological dictionaries that chronologically cover a thirty-year period (1990–2020).

Unfortunately, in Latvian lexicography during this thirty-year period a comprehensive evaluation of the terminological dictionaries has not been conducted; so far it has been done only in certain aspects. In the study on terminography of literary theory, Anita Helviga (2015) described the difficulties encountered in identifying terminological dictionaries. The most comprehensive studies have been made by the Translation and Terminology Centre [TTC] (TTC, 2005, 2007), including several studies by the Chairman of the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Māris Baltiņš (2006, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2020) and studies by Juris Baldunčiks (2012b; 2015). Still research of earlier years

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in lexicology and terminology are relevant, such as the studies of Alīse Laua (1981), Liene Roze (1982) and Valentīna Skujiņa (2002). Some researchers have highlighted issues related to the digitalisation of terminography, such as Eduards Cauna (2008) and Raimonds Apinis (2009).

Of course, more and more theoretical issues are based on views of well-known lexicographers and terminologists worldwide (see Sager, 1990; Rey, 1995; Cabré Castellvi, 1999, 2003), but it is very necessary to update the theoretical foundation of national terminography in the context of practical research. The terminology study project “Research of Latvian terminology: History, Theory and Practice” is currently being carried out in Latvia, which is open within the framework of the National Research Programme “Latvian language” (2019–2021). The aim of this project is to develop a terminology theory in Latvia and to gather historical terminology experience in some humanitarian fields that allow generalisations on common patterns. Co-author of this article, Anita Helviga, is a member of this programme, but the main author of the article, Elīna Peina, is developing her doctoral dissertation on Latvian terminography development trends and the related challenges at the University of Liepāja.

As part of the study so far, terminological dictionaries have been examined in several aspects – the experience of leading publishers and their view on publishing terminological dictionaries has been gathered; the Chairman of the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Māris Balčiņš, has been interviewed; a thematic characterization of the terminological dictionaries has been carried out in terms of the fields and economic sectors represented; a survey of the terminological dictionary users has been conducted which presents the main habits of the use of these dictionaries. This article reveals only a few aspects of this study.

Some challenges

One of the issues of Latvian terminography is the uneven coverage of terminology in different industries. About a third of the terminological dictionaries are in the legal sector, which mainly are multilingual dictionaries issued around the turn of the century. About a quarter of terminological dictionaries consist of economic term dictionaries; and management science dictionaries which more commonly are referred to as business vocabulary dictionaries are also widely represented. Transport and traffic terms are also sufficiently reflected in dictionaries, where maritime and port terms are the main part of this thematic group, which, in view of Latvia’s geographical location, is coherent. The thematic report shows that dictionaries are insufficient or not available at all in pharmaceutical, chemical engineering, hydro engineering, and veterinary medicine fields. About one-tenth of all dictionaries considered are multisectoral and polytechnic dictionaries which, due to their specific nature, do not apply to one specific field. Although dictionaries in the field of humanities and social sciences account for around a third of all published dictionaries, there are still sub-fields where there are no terminological dictionaries at all (e.g., literary theory, theatre science, text-formation). Perhaps the humanities in our society are not considered as an essential field, but for the learning process, knowledge-building, translating and research field dictionaries are a major factor. There are some solutions observed, a tendency to add a glossary as an annex to the teaching aids, or explanations of the terms used are placed alongside the text, etc. It is important that field professionals recognise the need for a dictionary of terms and look for a way to work with terminologists to solve the problem.

Another topical area of concern is the lack of reviews, articles and analysis about any lexicographical publication in Latvian philology. In Latvia, the dictionary review culture is almost gone – there is a lack of deep, knowledge-based reviews that look not only at dictionary macrostructure but also at microstructure. As Juris Baldunčiks has acknowledged, “dictionary reviews are a very rare phenomenon, but without criticism the quality improvement of dictionaries is unthinkable” (Baldunčiks, 2012a, p. 10). The situation has improved a little over the last decade – the Latvian Language Agency has carried out a major study “Compilation of dictionaries in Latvia 1991–2010” (2012), and Ventspils University of Applied Sciences has issued its first review journal (Proveja, 2017). However, this is not enough and there is no regularity of issuance. Many of the terminological dictionaries lack evaluation and many remain completely unaccounted for. Without criticism of dictionaries, there is no public perception of what a good dictionary is or which essential components should meet the criteria so the dictionary can be considered of good quality. Māris Balčiņš also agrees that the general public and the dictionary authors themselves are not used to such review culture: “Just because the review culture is irregular and rarely is there anything published, each published article or review is perceived as severe criticism”

(Baltiņš, personal interview, June 16, 2020). In an interview with the author of this article, Māris Baltiņš acknowledged that not only are there no reviews, but there are no well-designed dictionaries with introductions that explain the principles and intentions of creating the dictionary, there are no references to the resources or other indicators that are important to the dictionary user. This problem should also be addressed through closer cooperation between field specialists, lexicographers and terminologists.

Each country has specific procedures for the standardisation process of terminology. In Latvia, the terminology process has been managed by the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences since 1946. Laws and regulations have been developed which define the responsibilities and functions of the institutions and organisations involved in the terminology process (see Baltiņš, 2007, 2013). And yet there is a problem with this process. Although the approval of the Terminology Commission gives a quality stamp for any terminological dictionary, only about a quarter of the dictionaries included in this study have been approved by the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. According to representatives of leading publishers, this official approval of the dictionary is a time-consuming process, so it is not beneficial for publishing companies for which it is important to follow their plan (for more of publishers' experience, see Peina, 2020). Since the issuance of terminological dictionaries without official approval is not prohibited, a large number of terminological resources consist of dictionaries that no one has officially edited, reviewed, or accepted. Such practices do not increase the quality level in any way. Māris Baltiņš accents that more important than the formal aspect of approval is the professionalism and responsibility of the dictionary compiler, since not all of the terms are discussed in the Terminology Commission when approving the dictionaries. And the fact of approval alone doesn't signal the quality of the dictionary. The Terminology Commission calls for proposals to be submitted for consideration, where it is necessary to evaluate or decide on a new term or where the corresponding equivalent is to be determined, but it should be noted that not all thematic sub-commissions are working with an equal intensity.

As part of the study, several representatives of Latvian publishing houses were interviewed (Peina, 2020). The publishing house "Avots" has been the largest dictionary publisher in Latvia since 1980, but the number of published dictionaries in the last ten years has decreased significantly. During the interview the chief editor, Inta Kalniņa, was asked whether the publishing company "Avots" will continue to issue the terminological dictionaries. She replied: "Investments in dictionary publishing are too large – there are no customers in Latvia, unfortunately, and the publishing company can no longer afford it financially" (Kalnina, personal interview, October 24, 2018). Today the dictionary user is in a hurry, so according to a survey, printed resources are no longer the most convenient source of information. Online dictionaries and electronic term databases are the quickest and most convenient way to get the required information. David Crystal highlights the two advantages of electronic dictionaries – limitlessness and immortality of volume: "In an electronic world, dictionaries can be unlimited size, and nothing disappears. Because pages are time-stamped, the internet is already the largest corpus of attested historical language data we have ever known. In that dictionary, words never die. If words could talk, they would say they had finally achieved what they always wanted – immortality" (Crystal, 2009, p. 4). During the interview Māris Baltiņš acknowledged that he believes electronic resources will not win entirely because a printed dictionary has a sense of completeness that electronic dictionaries don't. The electronic resource certainly has its own advantages, but the existence of countless databases confuses the seeker. The existence of a single and reliable database would avoid such potential misunderstandings. Such a database could solve the problem of large dictionaries, a clear indication of the sources of terms would demonstrate the authority and reliability of the database, and the involvement of terminologists in maintaining the database would ensure the inclusion of officially approved terms in the database. At the end of 2018, the Latvian National Terminology Portal [LNT portal] (*termini.gov.lv*) was made available online, developed by the company "Tilde" in cooperation with the State Language Centre, the Latvian Language Agency and the Latvian Academy of Sciences. It includes the terms developed and approved by the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, the State Language Commission and the Translation and Terminology Centre (1996–2009). Terminology news has been available online since 2001, but now a single site has been established with a status of national importance.

Latvian National Terminology Portal – one of the solutions

One of the aims of the LNT portal is primarily related to the function of searching and locating terminology data, as well providing this possibility not only to the members of the Terminology Commission and sub-commissions, but anyone to participate in the process of developing terms. As indicated in the LNT portal, the other aims are also to “provide support to the machine translation service www.hugo.lv” and “provide support to the Latvian Language Agency in the reproduction of personal names and to provide an automated consultation process with other State institutions” (termini.gov.lv). The developers of the portal base such selection on the improvement concept of The Public Service System supported by the Cabinet, “which ensures each resident of Latvia is provided with the establishment and provision of a service that meets their needs, as well as to ensure that the State administration actions are fully understandable and transparent” (termini.gov.lv). On the other hand, the machine translation service Hugo.lv is a success story of Latvia, as it is able to offer innovative solutions to overcome language barriers. It introduces the latest developments in language technologies – “new machine translation systems, terminology management site and speech recognition tools” (termini.gov.lv). This new portal is not just a reflection of the current terminology process, but it is designed as a prospective digital tool that allows the opportunities created by technology to branch, expand, develop into the language.

The most important documents approved by the Terminology Commission are also available on the LNT portal, such as the terminology guidelines and the process of developing, approving and amending terms, or the terminology workflow. One of the most extensive sections of the portal is a summary about the operations of the Terminology Commission. There is a description of the structure, including sub-commissions, all necessary contact details, regulations and records of meetings, decisions on the rendition of terms in Latvian, decisions on the approval of terminological dictionaries, information about conferences, discussions, surveys, and the consultation section. Through the State Administration Services portal www.latvija.lv, anyone can authenticate and create a user account that is needed to allow the LNT portal visitors to participate actively in terminology discussions, thereby ensuring the widest participation of the public in the process of creating contemporary terminology. Access to terms is provided in two ways. Firstly, the LNT portal contains links to pre-established term databases in Latvian, such as “Letonika” (<https://www.termnet.lv>), as well as links to international sources of terminology, such as the “Consolidate European terminology EuroTermBank” (<https://www.eurotermbank.com>), or the “International Network for terminology TermNet” (<http://www.termnet.org>). Secondly, the LNT portal offers term collections, in total 97 (seen on 30 March 2021). Chronologically, the oldest collection of terms is available from the “Dictionary of Scientific Terminology” (1922), the latest being linked to the term resources approved during the first decades of the 21st century. In terms of volume, the largest term resources cover several tens of thousands of entries, e.g. the “Russian-Latvian Civil Engineering Term Dictionary” (1998) with 41270 entries, or the “Hydrometeorology Term Dictionary” (1976) with 11290 entries, while smaller collections consist of only a few dozen terms accepted at a single Terminology Commission meeting, e.g. “Workers financial participation terms” (13.11.2007) with 37 entries or a set of individual terms that complement what has been previously adopted, e.g. “Philosophy and Psychology Terms developed by the State Language Centre” with 18 entries.

The principles of creating term collections are different. One group is composed as electronically accessible processed pre-issued term dictionaries, e.g., Terminology Commissions’ approved dictionaries such as “Library funds and catalogues. Terminology dictionary” (1993), “English-Russian-Latvian explanatory dictionary. Data transmission and processing systems” (1995), “English-Latvian tax term dictionary” (2006), etc. The second group is bulletins of the Terminology Commission, such as bulletin No. 55 “Experiment Planning Terms” (1985), bulletin No. 58 “Auto Engineering Terms” (1989), bulletin No. 63 “Terms of Crystallography and Mineralogy” (1993). A third group refers to separate collections which summarise the terms developed by the State Language Centre, e.g., “Terms of Defence, Military Science and Armed Forces”, “Terms of Biology and its subfields”, “Economic and Financial Terms”, etc. Some collections include terms developed by different State and public institutions, e.g., “Terms developed by The State Audit Office”, “Terms used in translations of the *acquis communautaire* of the Translation and Terminology Centre”. As well as other decisions of term approval by the Terminology Commission are presented as separate collections.

Therefore, the data of each collection is very inhomogeneous, both in quantitative and qualitative results. The biggest benefit of the LNT portal is an advantage of all information in one source and the ability to use search, participation, and networking tools. But there are a number of limitations encountered in the practical use of the portal: in many collections the term is only stated (without equivalents in other languages or meaning explanation); it is not always possible to identify the time of approval of the term or collection (at least a year); there is no clear criterion of including terms in the LNT portal (are the terms not included in the portal not confirmed and not reliable to be used?). If these objections are mentioned as possible improvements, then here are some other recommendations: inserting links or full text for research (projects, articles, conference records, etc.) in Latvian terminology; adding “coming soon” updates and news on which collections are being prepared to be added, thereby creating a continued succession and eliminating the feeling that such ambitious works are becoming campaign-like (“jumping” one project to the next). In the Spring of 2021, users of the portal were able to participate in a survey, which raises expectations that some recommendations will be taken into account.

Conclusions

In Latvian terminology, it is necessary to update theoretical guidelines based on both the experience of terminology history and the experience of contemporary practice. It is not always possible to characterise the national terminology using world-wide known terminology conclusions, so it is necessary to develop criteria for a good terminological dictionary based on contemporary Latvian terminography resources. Active feedback systems between dictionary users and publishers should be developed. Given the reluctance of publishers to work in developing and publishing terminological dictionaries, a variety of electronic resources, digital dictionaries and databases should be developed to make official terminology easily accessible and usable for everyone. The requirement for the terminological dictionaries to be officially approved by the Terminology Commission is gradually replaced by the requirement that anyone who decides to publish a dictionary should work in close cooperation with field specialists, terminologists and lexicographers. More attention should be paid to those scientific fields where the terminological dictionaries have never been published (for example, literature). A continued study of the attitudes and habits of dictionary users is needed to make clear what the public expects from a terminological dictionary.

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