

## The non-Existence of a Theory of Terminology

Hitherto, I have employed the term 'theory of scientific terminology' tacitly. For the sake of formulating my pure problem and its practical or applied upshot, it is deemed proper to sketch an ideal theory. Let me take the Newtonian theory of (classical) mechanics in (31) and comment on its structure.

**31a)** Basic concepts: space, time, mass.

**31b)** Defined concepts: particle, force, energy, displacement, work, velocity, acceleration.

**31c)** Principles:

- (i) vector algebra such as addition  
 $\mathbf{AB} + \mathbf{BC} = \mathbf{AC}$
- (ii) Axiom 1: If  $\mathbf{F} = 0$ , then  $\mathbf{v} = 0$  or  $\mathbf{v} = \text{constant}$ .
- (iii) Axiom 2:  $\mathbf{F} = k \, d/dt (m \, \mathbf{v})$
- (iv) Axiom 3:  $\mathbf{F}_1 = -\mathbf{F}_2$
- (v) Axiom 4:  $\mathbf{F} = [-G \, m_1 m_2 / r^2] \mathbf{u}_r$

**31d)** Theorems:  $T = 1/2 \, m v^2, \dots$

**31e)** Bridge rules:

- (i) if a string is light, then its mass  $m = 0$
- (ii) The mass of an extended body is concentrated at its centre of mass.

From basic (i.e. undefined) concepts we obtain defined concepts. Principles include those from mathematics (vector algebra and calculus) and axioms or postulates. Well-formed formulae in this theory will conform to the principles. Theorems are obtained as a result of applying the principles as transformational rules. Bridge rules relate the theory to the real world of physical objects. Finally, it should be borne in mind that velocities are low compared to that of light.

Picht & Draskau (1985: 32-33) assert:

*The terminological needs of the Third World should not be ignored. Here, ... greater efforts are being devoted to forging effective instruments for professional communication from natural languages which are at present terminologically underdeveloped or only partially developed. The organisation of symposia in African and South American countries, intensified contacts with the Arab world and the Far East (China) are indicative of this trend. These languages will in future influence the development of the theory of terminology, enriching it with new knowledge and correcting many misapprehensions.*

Without stating explicitly who would "ignore" the needs of the so-called Third World, Picht and Draskau are hopeful that valuable impulses to the theory of terminology will emanate from the languages being elaborated. This hope notwithstanding, the cardinal question is whether there is what can, in the strict sense of the term, be referred to as a theory of terminology. A clear-cut answer to this question is given by Picht and Draskau themselves.

*It would be going too far at present to postulate the existence of a generally recognised basis for the theory of terminology, although there is no doubt that the same basic elements may be discerned, in one form or another, in the attitude of all the movements and schools of thought.*

Picht & Draskau (1985: 31)

There is, therefore, no theory of terminology. From this lack of a well-ground theory of terminology issues a plethora of *ad hoc* approaches to terminological elaboration. The approaches are characterisable as:

- (a) language identity-preserving principles
- (b) sememic or conceptual methods
- (c) expression formation methods in the language concerned
- (d) affix-inventing moves
- (e) source-defining for expressions

Criteria for terminology are not treated systematically and yet terminological elaboration is essentially PEGITOSCA-optimisation. *ad hoc* approaches to terminological elaboration brings with it the unfortunate transient nature of many suggested terms. A quick comparison of TUKI terms published in BAKITA (1976, 1978, 1980) with terms in TUKI (1990) reveals that many suggested terms have either been changed or discarded altogether. In (32) the transient nature of terms in Kiswahili is brought to light.

32) <u>Earlier TUKI term</u>	<u>Current TUKI term</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
elimumwili	anatomia	'anatomy'
tonoradi	atomu	'atom'
hamirojo	kabohidrati	'carbohydrate'
chembe	seli	'cell'
chembeuzi	selulose	'cellulose'
umbijani	klorofili	'chlorophyll'
kisadifu	jene	'gene'
uzaosafu	spishi	'species'
kiinichembe	nuklia	'nucleus'
kipeleanguvu	-nururishi	'radioactive'
-safu	jenusi	'genus'
insekta	mdudu	'insecta'
mimbapweke	pathenogenesisi	'parthenogenesis'
peteo	spektra	'spectrum'
kiungo	organi	'organ'
wikizangaomwili	chanjo	'vaccination'
nguvu	nishati	'energy'
fusi	sementi	'cement'
chocheo	homoni	'hormone'
mgwangwajuko	albino	'albino'

fumbatio  
upapachi

jifa  
simbiosi

'abdomen'  
'symbiosis'

It is therefore valid to infer probabilistically that the time which will elapse up to terminological maturity will be long if not very long - perhaps fifty years?