

## Terminology as a sense making social tool

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Since the middle of the first decade of this century, several authors have announced the dawn of a new Age, following the Information/ Knowledge Age (1970-2005?). We are certainly living in a Shift Age (Houle, 2007), but no standard designation has been broadly adopted so far, and others, such as Conceptual Age (Pink, 2005) or Social Age (Azua, 2009), are only some of the proposals to name current times.

Due to the amount of information available nowadays, meaning making and understanding seem to be common features of this new age of change; change related to (i) how individuals and organizations engage with each other, to (ii) the way we deal with technology, to (iii) how we engage and communicate within communities to create meaning, i.e., also social networking-driven changes.

The Web 2.0 and the social networks have strongly altered the way we learn, live, work and, of course, communicate. Within all the possible dimensions we could address this change, we chose to focus on language – a taken-for-granted communication tool, used, translated and recreated in personal and geographical variants, by the many users and authors of the social networks and other online communities and platforms.

In this paper, we discuss how the Web 2.0, and specifically social networks, have contributed to changes in the communication process and, in bi- or multilingual environments, to the evolution and freeware use of the so called “international language”: English.

Next, we discuss some of the impacts and challenges of this language diversity in international communication in the shift age of understanding and social networking, focusing on specialized networks.

Then we point out some skills and strategies to avoid babelization and to build meaningful and effective content in mono or multilingual networks, through the use of common and shared concepts and designations in social network environments. For this purpose, we propose a social and collaborative approach to terminology management, as a shared, strategic and sense making tool for specialized communication in Web 2.0 environments.

**Keywords:** specialized social networks, terminology, terminology training.

**Introduction: Social networks and terminology in a global communication context**

Social networks are here understood as “a set of people (or organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of social relations, such as friendships, co-working, or *information exchange*” [emphasis added] (Garton et al.1997 apud Primo, 2006: 5).

Terminology is (i) the science studying the structure, formation, development, usage and management of terminologies in various subject fields and (ii) a set of designations belonging to a special language (ISO 1087-1:2000). Terminology work or management is, thus, the work concerned with collecting, describing, processing and presenting concepts and their designations (ISO 1087-1:2000). These concepts and designations are shared by a community, who creates and *transfers knowledge* [emphasis added] in a specialized communication context, where all members should be functional interlocutors.

Specialized information exchange is, therefore, the common ground between social networks and terminology. Terminology is, on the one hand, the central component of specialized communication, since it represents the concepts of the subject field. On the other hand, terminology management is still quite an unknown activity, outside some academic and specialized circles, although it is a central and support practice to all specialized communication contexts.

These contexts underwent a great expansion over the last years, especially due to advances and changes in information and communication technologies, social behaviors, and to the way we produce, access to, use and share knowledge, among others. What has not changed is that language(s) (verbal or not) are still necessary to communicate and exchange information, which is most of the times taken for granted and not paid much attention to.

Also, in international communication sites, English is frequently the common language, but since it is learned and disseminated in so many places and ways, “common” means rather “done by many people” than “belonging to or shared by two or more people or groups”<sup>1</sup>. This fact creates diversity, ambiguity, miscommunication and certainly demands communication management skills from all speakers. This ambiguity is especially critical when we are dealing with specialized communication and with different interlocutors’ backgrounds in a global multilingual knowledge society. Therefore, it is our belief that terminology is today a prerequisite and a sense making tool to avoid ambiguity in specialized communication and knowledge transfer, also in Web 2.0 environments, such as social networks, blogs and other.

But, before going any further, let us first briefly analyze the general framework of social environment we are referring to here.

### **The need to make sense in a collaboration-centric knowledge society**

Society is a dynamic reality and evolves through different ages. Taking the so-called developed countries as a reference, it is generally accepted that we have lived in the information and knowledge age for the past 40/ 50 years (Drucker, 1999; Toffler, 2000 apud Rodrigues), which was particularly noticed with the broad dissemination of the internet and information and communication technologies, especially the Web 2.0. The knowledge-based society seems, however, to have arrived in a new shift moment, according to some authors, as we briefly present in the following table:

<i>Author</i>	<i>Age Designation</i>	<i>Main Features</i>
Herman Bryant	<i>4th Wave</i>	This concept is mainly connected to management.

<sup>1</sup> These are two of the definitions for “common” in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online. URL: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/common> (20.1.15).

Maynard and Susan Mehrtens (1996)	(this is also the name of the Book and it follows Alvin Toffler's terminology: 3rd Wave – referring to the Information age)	The 4 <sup>th</sup> wave is the age when companies will be more integrated in the surrounding environment, enhancing their responsibility. Their assets are ideas, information, creativity and vision.
Daniel Pink (2006)	<i>Conceptual Age</i> Book: Pink, Daniel H. (2006) A Whole New Mind. Penguin. London	This new age is based on 6 skills, related to “high concept” and “high touch”: design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning.
David Houle (2007)	<i>Shift Age</i> (it is also the name of the book and refers to the period 2007-2030)	The global status of human evolution (global economy, citizenship, ability to adapt to new environments, ...) Main asset: intellectual property
Maria Azua (2009)	<i>Social Age</i> (in <i>The Social Factor</i> )	Access, use, creation and sharing of knowledge through social networking. Communication and collaboration-centric approach.

Table 1 – Designations and main features of a new Age

Although different designations have been proposed by the various authors, the concept underneath each of them is quite similar in many ways, and refers to a knowledge-based society, deeply dependent on technology, but focusing on a more balanced and integrated use of information: through more cooperation among the different agents, creativity, integration with the environment, and of course social networking, considered the “real revolution” since 2000 (Azua, 2009: 40).

“Today, a tsunami of blogs comes from all levels of expertise, *from professional writers to rank amateurs* [emphasis added]. People can’t get enough of social tools. Seemingly overnight there are a host of social tools available online, including MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, Orkut Windows Live, Classmates, Cyworld, Bebo, Hi5, and others. Likeminded enthusiasts can connect on 24hTennis, Taltopia, Travellerspoint, Librarything, GoodReads, MyArtSpace, CakeFinancial, and others. You can celebrate your heritage on BlackPlanet, MiGente, Geni, and many others. While you’re at it, why not expand your business network with LinkedIn and Plaxo? All these relatively new sites, attracting tens of millions of visitors each day, are the direct result of the revolutionary changes of the Social Age.” (Azua, 2009: 40)

Over the last 6 years, since this text was written, much has changed in the referred to social media: some have disappeared (like Orkut), others have developed into mainstream use, like Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, and many others have appeared, like Quora, for instance. But one thing that we need to make clear here, is what social media is/are. It is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”, i.e., in this source it is a technological means for communication between people. And this is, according to Primo (2012), also one of the most common definitions among social media researchers, when the term is not defined by an extensional definition only.

In fact, the meaning of the term “social media” is yet not very clear, although the term is broadly used and seems to be taken for granted in most glossaries of social media, where it commonly does not even appear as an entry. Primo (2012) refers to the two main approaches to social media, technology-based and social-based, but stresses the unilateral influence and the lack of real interaction in both, which is, in his opinion, what can be really social in this reality. Some other terms have been proposed to represent the concept of participative

content generation, but social media is the most popular, and therefore not easy to replace. Among other factors, this popularity depends on the term's massive use and on the preference of the different communities. User's trends can, in fact, be one of the most important strengths in terminology development and use, which of course has been closely studied and analyzed by marketing research, for example.

Companies connect to clients more and more via technology, especially via two-way communication, digital platforms, enabled by semantic web, which opened new ways of collaboration and communication (also via social networks) among committed individuals. Language, as one of the means to express consumer behavior, is clearly one of the most important connections between companies and consumers, whose opinion and consensus can, for instance, "accelerate standardization of products through their massive influence and buying power." (Azua, 2009: 39)

The crowd's feedback and opinion are, therefore, an important strength in business, which monitors the markets and consumers' behaviors, namely the language they use and the most frequent terms and phraseologies in their texts, in order to develop suitable and effective marketing tools and campaigns.

"Keyword Research, for instance, is, therefore, "one of the most important, valuable, and high return activities in the search marketing field. Ranking for the "right" keywords can make or break your website. Through the detective work of puzzling out your market's keyword demand, you not only learn which terms and phrases to target with SEO, but also learn more about your customers as a whole." (Fishkin et al., 2014)

In this "detective work", some of the work that companies are doing is also terminology management: collecting the terms and organizing them in databases and glossaries, so that the product or information searched can be found on the company's website and catalogues. However, most of the times, they are not aware of it and do not possess the necessary training to do it right.

Many individuals, companies, entities, aware of the need to make sense of such an amount of information, platforms and social networks release their own glossaries on the domain of social media, for example. Nevertheless, these tools cannot really be defined as glossaries, and are nothing more than simple term lists, commonly with personal definitions and sometimes quite useless. A glossary needs to present information on designations and concepts, being each definition "a representation of concept by a descriptive statement which serves to differentiate it from released concepts" (ISO 1087-1:2000).

In fact, so that users and authors can network, communicate and share content and knowledge, they need to refer to the same realities [*concepts*] with known designations:

"Strong collaboration starts with common understanding, using *a common language and conceptual framework*." [emphasis added] (Azua, 2009)

In a global context, where geography, language, education or economic background are *per se* no longer obstacles to communication, and in a dynamic knowledge-based society where recipients are also authors, the main barrier to communication is in fact the lack of a real common language and conceptual framework. Whenever this communication is dealing with specialized content, then that common language also depends on a common terminology.

## Social Networking: from mainstream to specialized communication

Specialized communication contexts are no longer found exclusively in academic, scientific, industrial and technical circles, since more and more non-formal and informal contexts offer learning opportunities and access to knowledge to a broader public.

Currently, the World Wide Web contains an impressive amount of specialized information, disseminated by the academy, public and private research organizations and other experts, in various languages, formats and sites. This means that highly specialized discourse, once shared between experts and peers only, is available to anyone interested in the subject field and possesses cognitive skills to assimilate, create and apply that knowledge. Information and communication technologies, especially the Web 2.0, new learning and knowledge platforms and social networking have made this possible. Informal and non-formal learning (through MOOCs, for instance) is strongly disseminated and its recognition is also being discussed by formal education entities, universities, and other institutions like the OECD and the Council of Europe, for instance:

“The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an important means for making the ‘lifelong learning for all’ agenda a reality for all and, subsequently, for reshaping learning to better match the needs of the 21st century knowledge economies and open societies.” (Werquin, 2010)

The information age has made access to knowledge and knowledge production easier and less exclusive, and therefore the information consumer has now more source options, and can be more selective, autonomous and less dependent on standardized or static solutions.

Information is available in various forms, formats, supports and released under several perspectives. The way how and purpose for it is used differ from user to user, depending on his/ her culture and background and, regardless of its accuracy, if the information does not suit the user’s purposes, mindsets, beliefs or priorities s/he will probably not pay attention to it. S/he can then look for other sources, or, in certain cases, create her/his own content. For instance in IT contexts, and as Azua (2009) states, “teams with needs for specialized tools or information, usually remain dissatisfied with the formal production solutions created by IT organizations because their needs remain unfilled.”

Social networking went mainstream with Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, just to name a few, but since some years ago, specialized social networks also became popular to find and share specific information and develop collaborative work in mixed communities – from experts to newbies –, like Quora, for example, and also in closed professional communities. The latter, like ResearchGate and Academia.edu, just to name a few, are especially interesting in the scope of this paper, since they exclusively accept experts (academic or professional), whose main goal is to access, share and develop knowledge in an effective, quick, coherent and comprehensive way. Knowledge management is always unavoidable when experts cooperate, and collaborative environments are no exception.

Therefore, social networks need to enable straightforward communication and knowledge exchange, optimize text analysis and production, through clear and effective concepts and designations and for this purpose terminology methodologies can be extremely helpful. *CogniNet* and *ConceptME* are a good example of how terminology can be of help to optimize collaborative environments and knowledge production. *CogniNet* proposed new theoretical foundations and methodological tools to help collaborative networks of organizations create and manage shared conceptualizations of work and businesses and, in this framework,

developed *ConceptME*, “a web based platform for conceptual models development by group editing, discussion and negotiation. It enables teams, including domain specialists, knowledge engineers and terminologists, to build together a conceptual representation of a domain.” Since this platform is free for teaching and research purposes, we hope it will improve cooperation and knowledge management and raises more awareness on the practice of terminology.

Different but also important expert collaborative networks in the social media world are blogs. Still considered by many simple logs of personal opinions or diaries, blogs are, however, in many cases relevant communities of specialized discourse, as Primo (2008) concluded in a study carried out on Brazilian Portuguese Blogs. He analyzed 5218 posts on 50 blogs ranked in “Technorati Top 100 blogs” and concluded that half of the posts were on technology and politics, being the latter discussed by many journalists and not only by common citizens.

Blogs and specialized social networks are, therefore, thematic-centered, but throughout the years they became more and more user-centered, i.e., users can edit, comment, or join other users and build up smaller networks, to share and seek even more narrow expertise.

Specialized social networks are thus intensive communication channels, where language undergoes quick changes and additions. Although language is rarely a topic of concern, many communities, especially the ones releasing new products or ideas or with mixed expertise profiles, create their own glossaries (e.g. Wikipedia), taxonomies or other knowledge organization tools to build up a common conceptual framework.

This “terminology management” is mostly done by the users-authors, even if they lack a good command of language or proper terminology training. Being a collaborative work, users commonly help each other, editing and revising poor-content contributions. Several projects of collaborative terminology have also appeared, with the publication of many glossaries on various themes, courses and webinars on terminology and also some collaborative platforms for terminology management, such as Termbases.eu, TermWiki or projects of terminology as a service like TaaS, just to name a few.

In fact, knowledge organization, even beyond language, is more and more managed by the users-authors themselves, who rely on social networking to be more autonomous, and get what was almost exclusive before, like, for instance, the classification of information:

“Previously the classification of information and objects (whether people or things) was of the exclusive domain of the highly specialized science of taxonomy. Now, through the folksonomy of social networking, everyone is getting into the act.”  
(Vanderval, 2007)

### **The “linguistic revolution” and the need for terminology management**

Technologies and social networking have driven and accelerated evolution in the most used languages, both in general and specialized language. However, this change has definitely been more evident in general language and in the so called “international language”: English. There has truly been a “linguistic revolution” (Crystal, 2001) with the World Wide Web and we can say that this revolution was deeply technology-based but mainly user-driven: the users-authors of social networks and online communities took command of language (both mother language and the international language) and re-invented it, translated it and recreated it in “national variants”, acronyms and abbreviations, and made it much more visual (photos, emojis, stickers and videos). In fact, the visual language is already considered the new universal language in social media.

Verbal content, however, either in the World Wide Web and in social networks, can more and more be found in many different languages, but most content and posts are still in English. But, since English became the world's second language, and it is heard in many voices, it would probably be more accurate to speak of "English languages". Again, both in general and specialized language, English is adapted to the communities who speak it as a second language, as for instance in the European Commission, with the so called European English.

According to David Crystal (2003), English is previewed to have only around 15% native speakers in 2020, who will soon be a minority. This fact, to be proved true, means that there is no real common language anymore, beyond the sense we mentioned earlier of "done by many people", and can certainly have many outcomes, one of which being more linguistic diversity and ambiguity.

As far as specialized communication contexts are concerned, this diversity will probably be less felt, because these communities are smaller. Moreover, specialized contexts are connected to a domain (of activity, a profession), i.e. a common conceptual framework, which being well known by the community members, both online and offline, gives them guidance on the meaning of technical designations.

These experts in social networks need, however, some language and terminology training, not only in the mother language, but also and especially when they use English terminologies, to assure that common knowledge is in fact represented and shared accurately in their discourses. Moreover, some specialized communities, more commercially-driven, are vital for product standardization and terminology decisions, and companies pay close attention to their communication, assessment and preferences. Many companies have in fact understood that they can collaborate with the crowd in several project and product development, also related to language, such as translation. Crowd translation has been used in a great number of social networks and also in some commercial projects, especially related to least spoken languages and by IT companies, like IBM and Symantec, for instance.

Crowd terminology is, thus, a natural step, and there are already some thoughts and proposals on terminology work and crowdsourcing on the way (Karsch, 2015), since the crowd is, in certain domains, the one who uses specialized language on a day-to-day basis and if it does not like the designations or they do not suit its purposes, it will likely find alternatives based on preference, creativity and trends, but not on training.

It is our conviction that any user of the specialized languages, whatever the context of use - social networking, academic, technical or business - needs terminology training, in order to be able to fully communicate and share knowledge, through the effective use of common and shared concepts and designations. For this purpose, we propose a social and collaborative approach to terminology management training, this way promoting terminology management as a shared, strategic and sense making tool for content and knowledge creators and users in social media.

### **Terminology as a sense making social tool**

As we mentioned in the introduction, in specialized communication contexts all users need to be able to use language functionally and, equally important, precisely. Therefore, terminology work is highly important, once it focuses on the organization and representation of knowledge. However, it is hardly the case that all users need to be terminologists to communicate in specialized contexts, since the main purpose is not to study the designations of the subject field, but to create, share and be able to understand knowledge, one of the key features of society and economy. The ability to manage, understand, balance and express knowledge in different ways (not only verbally) are, therefore, must-have skills in the context of specialized social networks, and depend also on the user being able to cope with his/her needs of terminology management, either in a monolingual, or in a bilingual or multilingual context. In specialized networks, these needs are both content

and technology related, i.e., on the one hand, users need to know how to find information on the unknown designations and concepts and, on the other hand, they need to integrate, share and edit terminology in a simple and accessible way.

As far as content (designations and concepts) is concerned, all users should have basic training on terminological research, validation and presentation techniques. This means to be able to know which questions should be asked, which sources are to be trusted and which categories of information need to be defined for the usage purposes. Basically, a core set of terminology management guidelines that help users-authors build a common conceptual framework, represented by clear definitions, designations, equivalents (bilingual/ multilingual/ non-verbal) and expert validation (both personal and documentary) in order to allow users to use and share specialized content correctly and with the least ambiguity possible.

Terms, and other conceptual designations (icons, symbols, videos, pictures among others), also need to be presented in a plain and user-friendly way, possibly open to edition in certain data categories, in order to allow interactivity and true collaborative work, under certain established criteria.

It is also very important to realize that a designation is the interface of a concept, which needs to be fully understood, in itself and in its inter-conceptual connections, both intralinguistically, interlinguistically or intersemiotically, in order to make sense. More than verbal or non-verbal language, specialized designations are knowledge representations, and basic terminology management skills are therefore the right tools to access and share information with accuracy, as for instance in a bilingual specialized communication context, as we illustrate below:

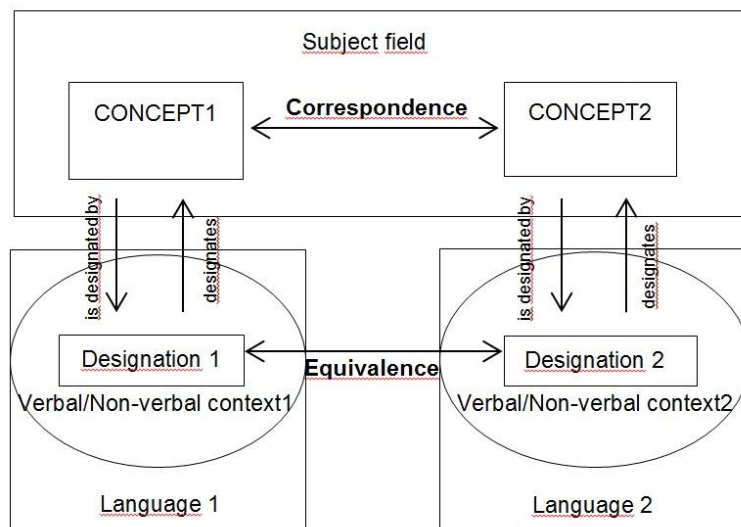


Figure 1 – Relation between term and concept in a bilingual



Besides understanding the relation between a term and a concept, it is equally fundamental to be aware of how to validate the designation's use and equivalents and also, but not only, of what to take into consideration in the creation of new terms, for instance.

As far as technology integration of the terminology is concerned, several options are available, some of which we have already briefly referred to (Termbase.eu, Termwiki.com, TaaS, CogniNet), being thus the most important requirement that it contains the basic data categories - i.e., data elements such as source, definition, input date and other - that allow the recording, maintenance and quickly and easily retrieval of terminological information in connection with collaborative work.

### **Final Remarks**

Specialized social networks (SSN) are, above all, a knowledge development and sharing context, being on this account an important specialized communication context, where users may have different expertise profiles, but even though should be fully able to manage and access knowledge.

Terminology, as a knowledge management tool, enables SSN users to acquire the necessary skills to search, analyze, validate, present and distribute terminology in a procedural way, interconnecting all necessary knowledge dimensions: concept and its designations.

Basic terminology training is, according to us, a fundamental specialized communication management skill, both to understand specialized language and texts, and to transfer knowledge in a clear, straightforward and accurate way.

With terminology training and awareness, even though the number of SSN users is growing and the user profiles are more and more diverse, a common language and conceptual framework can be assured, and users can avoid potential diversity and ambiguity in specialized communication contexts, by using terminology as a sense making tool.

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