

Specialized Language in Sociology

Cristina NICULESCU-CIOCAN
Romanian-American University

Abstract

Sociological terminology is a wide field of knowledge that encompasses terms which also belong to other domains or to common language. This is why it sometimes happens that different semantic aspects occur in normative and descriptive sources of information. Checking the common ground between dictionaries and texts is an essential aspect for descriptive terminology. Another interest in our research is to analyze the terminological status of the analyzed sociological units, i.e. to examine whether they are indeed strictly specialized terms or mere linguistic units (namely: words).

Keywords

terminology, sociology, affixation, prefixoids

1. Introduction

Sociology is a relatively recent science included in the field of knowledge, and this aspect influences the sociological terminology (perceived as an inventory of terms in the above-mentioned domain). Therefore, sociological terminology is also relatively new and makes use of recent terms.

Another important issue is sociology including terms which have also been used (as mere words) in common language or in related domains (generally within humanities as well), which also impacts on their meaning. This means that sociology can also borrow or make use of terms which actually belong to other scientific areas.

This paper aims at analyzing items and structures belonging to sociological terminology, at researching the typology of contexts that bears certain linguistic/terminological units, and at finding important semantic and formal features of the terms included under the broad category of sociological terminology and other specific subcategories.

2. Specialized Language/Terminology

Terminology has grown in popularity due to its dynamic and pragmatic features. The main reasons for this remark are the following: there is an increasing number of domains and subfields being subjected to terminological research; the number of specialized books and scientific articles is increasing, as well; it is featured in many web-resources; it refers to an applied study that cannot be strictly theoretically analyzed; it relies on the actual use of terms.

In 2004 it was included in Wikipedia, which is extensively used by both academics and other categories of people and it is continually subjected to recent development. It was awarded its own page ID (430476), thus being included in important topics inquired about. Because of people's increased interest and its dynamism, it has been edited more than 300 times so far.

Specialized language and terminology are sometimes used interchangeably in contexts, and might hence be considered synonymous items:

"Terminology or specialized language is more than a technical or particular instance of general language. In today's society with its emphasis on science and technology, the way specialized knowledge concepts are named, structured, described, and translated has put terminology or the designation of specialized knowledge concepts in the limelight." (Faber and Lopez Rodriguez 2012: 9)

The coordinating conjunction "or" generates the idea that the two units belong to the same level of conceptualization and that they share most, if not all semantic elements.

According to other sources, there is a strong semantic connection between specialized language and terminology, in the sense that the syntagma "specialized language" is semantically superior to terminology, as the following definition shows:

"Terminology – specialized language or linguistic subsystem that uses a terminology and other linguistic or non-linguistic means to create non-ambiguous specialized communication, whose major role is to convey knowledge in a certain field of professional activity." (DSL 2005: 535; A.T.)

There is a difference between normative and descriptive sources of information: the dictionary of language sciences and the article from a book of linguistics. The problem occurs when the hyponym and its superordinate are used symmetrically, although they are not. Moreover, this situation is not disambiguated throughout the text, so anyone lacking knowledge in the field could draw an incorrect conclusion.

Terminology has been created in order to make specialized communication extremely clear as a natural consequence of the development of technology, as Dubuc also states:

"Terminology was not the result of the desire to create a different field. It is the enormous development of technology and the growing needs of communication among different communities that lies behind its development as an autonomous discipline. Dubuc (1985)" (Cabr  1999: 14)

Terminology is therefore the main element that specialized language relies upon and "plays a crucial role wherever and whenever domain-specific information and knowledge is generated, used, recorded and processed, passed on, implemented, translated and interpreted" (Infoterm, 2005).

Although it has been subjected to changes during its various stages of development from its occurrence around 1930 (also see Cabr  1999: 5), terminology seems to continue growing and showing that it has an endless spring of information from real texts to be analyzed and discussed.

The beginning of terminology is actually a doctoral thesis belonging to Eugen Wüster who wished to create a specific methodology for the research of terms within context in order to eliminate all ambiguity from (highly) specialized communication. This stage was acknowledged to last for thirty years, starting 1930 until 1960 according to Auger (Cabr  1999: 5). The second stage lasted for fifteen years, when terminology was well organized and highly structured, and in 1975 started the so-called “boom” of modern terminology. The last stage included in Pierre Auger’s list is the “expansion”, and terminology seems to have been continually expanding since 1985.

By means of terminology we understand: a specialized language that uses a series of terms; a set of completely non-ambiguous terms which belong to one specific field of knowledge and/or activity; an interdisciplinary scientific field which regards general issues of all specialized languages (accordind to DSL 2005: 535). In the current paper we are going to rely on the second concept of terminology, and check the variety of terms that can be included in corpora as specialized language items.

3. Specialized Language of Sociology

The first aspect that is worth mentioning is that both terminology (perceived as a hyponym of specialized language) and sociology are two “young” fields of knowledge. Terminology supposedly occurred in 1930, as it is previously mentioned within the paper. Sociology emerged as a scientific subject about one century sooner, i.e. at the beginning of the 19th century, but it had also existed previously as the so-called “spontaneous sociology” (Popovici 2011), which is highly empirical and limited due to its subjectivity.

The dynamism of sociological terminology is a natural consequence of extralinguistic factors, such as the development of sociology itself and its relation to other social sciences (history, economics, psychology for instance). Another essential aspect is the lack of homogeneity in all the inquired aspects, and therefore, in specialized units of sociology:

“[...] we will remember that the term ‘sociology’ refers to a somewhat heterogeneous and often times conflicting and discontinuous network of scholars, theories, concepts, methods, intellectual traditions, schools of thought and substantive topics generally associated with the study of society” (Castellani and Hafferty 2009: 2).

Sociology “suffers” from interdisciplinarity, in the sense that it is influenced by other fields of science, and the evidence in this respect is growing. History, chemistry, economics, computer science, management, statistics (and other areas) seem to enter sociology and adjust to the domain and specialized language.

This is how terms such as feedback, system evolution, goal attainment, socionics, sociocybernetics, computational sociology, autopoiesis, social

simulation, equilibrium and others have received sociology-embedded meaning and have enriched the sociological terminology (viewed as a set of terms).

As in the case of previous research in the specialized language of this social science, many of these terms are not to be found in normative sources. They can be found in recent scientific books, articles etc. as descriptive elements that generate a current and predictive image of sociology.

4. Affixation in sociological terminology

Linguistically speaking, as far as the form is concerned, there are simple (organicism, adaptation, equilibrium), compound (sociotics, sociocybernetics, sociodynamics, autopoiesis, feedback) and complex terminological units (computational sociology, social simulation, data mining, system evolution, goal attainment etc.).

We have noticed that socio- has become a rather widely used prefixoid (or pseudoprefix) and we can notice that it generates a link between concepts pertaining to subjects which belong to various scientific fields and sociology in the case of this paper (also see Burani et al 1996: 55-72, Nefs et al 2003: 191-192). It is the case of internalizing terms which otherwise regard other domains.

The problem is not only that socio- is a prefixoid, and not a real prefix, but that it is defined as having a broad meaning, which also includes common language: “combining form used with the meanings ‘social’, ‘sociological’, or ‘society’, in the formation of compound words: sociometry, socioeconomic” (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/socio->). What we can infer from this definition is that it can make reference to sociology, but it can also be used non-terminologically, and hence ambiguity might emerge from its descriptive use in various texts and contexts.

While searching the Internet for options that include this pseudoprefix, we have come across the following hyphenated items: socio-analysis, socio-hydrology, socio-economic, socio-economics, socio-legal, socio-demographic, socio-spatial, socio-cultural, socio-affective, socio-environmental, socio-contextual, socio-technical, socio-onomastics, socio-political, socio-informatics. These results have occurred in the first ten pages of Google search only (on the 21st of February 2017), and the most frequent was the adjective socio-economic. The results show that compounds with socio- are extremely heterogeneous as far as the conceptual information and the level of text specialization are concerned.

The next search involving Google as a search engine tried to establish whether the results from the previous stage formally require a hyphen and the conclusion was that the same words (whether adjectives or nouns) can involve hyphenation or not.

Semantically speaking, from the linguistic units enumerated above, only the following are enlisted as embedded in sociology:

- sociospatial: “(sociology) relating to sociological aspects of (mostly urban) spaces (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/sociospatial>);
- sociodemographic: “of or pertaining to sociodemography” (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/sociodemographic>);

sociodemography: “a branch of study combining sociology and demography” (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/sociodemography>).

We can notice that the second term (which is an adjective) requires the definition of the noun it derives from, but it is a sociological term nevertheless.

The following can have a common language meaning which makes reference to society and are not formally included under sociology by means of conceptual hierarchy and do not include clear sociological reference within their definitions: socioeconomic, sociolegal, sociocultural, sociopolitical, socio-environmental.

There are terms which truly connect two scientific fields and can be considered interdisciplinary. Socioonomastics – for instance, is a link between sociology and linguistics: “In socio-onomastics, names in society are examined. Socio-onomastics can be defined as a sociolinguistic study of names. Above all, it explores the use and variation of names. The socio-onomastic research method takes into account the social, cultural, and situational field in which names are used.”(<http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.27?rskey=b05UEu&result=21>) . Socio-analysis creates a connection between psychology and sociology: “Socio-analysis is the activity of exploration, consultancy, and action research which combines and synthesises methodologies and theories derived from psychoanalysis, group relations, social systems thinking, organisational behaviour, and social dreaming. Socio-analysis offers a conception of individuals, groups, organisations, and global systems that takes into account conscious and unconscious aspects and potentialities. From this conception are born methods of exploration which can increase capacities through making conscious what was unconscious for individuals, groups, and organisations, and through releasing energy and ideas that help create individual and organizational direction, and meaning”(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socio-analysis>). Sociohydrology includes concepts from hydrology and sociology: “Socio-hydrology is an interdisciplinary field studying the dynamic interactions and feedbacks between water and people. Areas of research in socio-hydrology include the historical study of the interplay between hydrological and social processes, comparative analysis of the co-evolution and self-organization of human and water systems in different cultures, and process-based modelling of coupled human-water systems” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socio-hydrology>).

Socioinformatics only appears in texts with this exact form. In definition, it is only the syntagm social informatics that can be extracted. This requires further linguistic and/or terminological analysis to check whether the two forms share conceptual data or not.

Socioaffective and sociocontextual are both used in texts, but there is no formal definition in a normative source according to the web search. There are definitions provided in complex texts only.

And there is one other example that is explicitly defined as both common language and specialized language: sociotechnical – “having

both social / sociological and technical / technological aspects”(http://www.yourdictionary.com/sociotechnical).

5. Conclusions

Specialized language in sociology appears heterogeneous as form, cognitive content, descriptive and normative use, and all these issues need to be addressed terminologically in order to ensure the clarity and conciseness of specialized communication.

Because the texts use terminological units which are not to be found and defined in common language or sociological dictionaries, the authors have freedom as far as the context is concerned, and readers do not have a reliable source to check the accuracy of textual and contextual data and might misuse the term in the future, as well.

Semantically speaking, sociology operates by means of so-called terms which are in reality linguistic units and may be included in a variety of texts, no matter which level of specialization they belong to.

We suggest that terminography may become more involved in sociology, as well as in other fields and that they establish an accurate relation between concepts and their perception and use in spite of high terminological dynamism in the domain.

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