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TERMINOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY: FROM LOGIC TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

L.M. Alexeeva's paper focuses on the relationship that has existed, and continues to exist, between Philosophy and Terminology throughout their development.

Her text presents a series of ideas that provide the foundation to the main topic of the paper: the relationship between terminology and philosophy has changed from concentrating on logic –the main focus since the birth of terminology until a few years ago– to place itself in the field of the philosophy of science. This transition has brought new themes and issues to terminology, together with a different understanding of terms themselves.

The main ideas developed in her paper can be summarised as follows:

Philosophy has played an important role in terminology; it has conditioned the concept itself of the term and the conception of the theory of terminology. Because of this, one can say that the Philosophy of Terminology is one of the fundamental aspects of terminology, as its purpose is to understand the nature of terms and their relationship with reality and the mind.

The Philosophy of Terminology is founded on the idea that philosophy lies at the origin and development of all disciplines, and that philosophers were the first to raise the issue of the relationship between thought and language –the tool for representing and communicating thought.

Philosophy was also the first discipline to reflect on what a term is, what the relationship between terms and objects is, and whether terminology describes reality or constructs a representation of reality. According to Alexeeva, Philosophy has helped terminology to achieve the status of a science. Philosophy has contributed in clarifying what a term is and whether terminology is an autonomous discipline or just a practice.

In its beginning, the development of terminology was conditioned by logic. During the early 19th century, philosophy increased its interest in language. The Vienna Circle –which principles were used by Wüster to develop the theory of terminology–, assumed that language had a logical structure that reflected the structure of reality and scientific thought could only be expressed through this language, based on logic. It also assumed that all sciences could be treated in the same manner as physics, which was considered to be the science par excellence.

During this period under the influence of logic, terminology sought to describe terms as representations of reality; the term systems of different branches of science were developed,

and the representation system was unified. Within this framework, terminology is understood to be a branch of the scientific disciplines.

Nevertheless, this system of logical representation –although it allowed the unification of different disciplines– could not describe all terms, especially those that can be represented in different systems. In fact, in Terminology there is a discrepancy between “the desire to obtain a definite and truthful data” and “the impossibility to reach this aim”. Thus, the problem of terminology is, on one hand, trying to develop a suitable description method, while, on the other, solving problems of term standardisation and unification.

Within Russian philosophy, several thinkers came forth with new reflections on terminology. Among them, P. Florenski, who deals with the correlation between scientific disciplines and terminology, and the specificity of the terminological object. Regarding the correlation between the sciences and terminology, he poses how the sense of any discipline lies in the creation of its terminology, for terms are thought stops that reveal the conception and development of a particular discipline. Terms are units that “fix” a specific knowledge. In addition to Florenski, Alexeeva also mentions Lotte, who stresses that terminology develops by evolution or by revolution, and Vinokur, who introduces the distinction between the common word –corresponding to the name of an object– and the term –which is the name of a concept. He also believes that terms are “functions” of words.

Currently, in modern terminology, these problems have been replaced by different ones. The most important one concerns the dynamics of terms: the relationships established between language, mind and knowledge (how human beings perceive, categorise and express reality), and the relationship between terminology and scientific disciplines (how disciplines create terms). Terms are understood to be units of information created by a discipline, and are integrated within its system forming a structure and partaking of its internal regularities. Thus, terms are interconnected with the different disciplines and evolve with them.

With this approach, Terminology is separated from logic, to which it has been linked since its creation as a discipline, and it teams up with the philosophy of science.

In this new approach of the philosophy of science, terms are not mere language units nor representations of preexisting real objects; instead, they are “constructs” of thought within a certain discipline. Thus, they are not only descriptive units, they are also models created especially to be analysed. In contrast to the previous approach, based on logic, current philosophy considers terminology as an integrative discipline composed of different theories.

In the logical approach, terms were understood to be static units whose only point of interest was their systematisation within a structured system, and they were only studied as independent units set apart from language; the new philosophy asserts the linguistic nature of terms and observes their dynamics, where they are created by means of language in a defining metalinguistic activity which gives them a new meaning within the system. Thus, terms become “names of thought”. These new terms are interpretations of prior scientific theories and, once they become fixed, theories are based on them. The activity of using terminology

as the reflection of a discipline in order to explain the evolution of this scientific discipline is called metaterminology.

In fact, Alexeeva's paper, written from the perspective of Philosophy, sets out from the interdisciplinary nature of terms –units which she believes are the central object of Terminology as a discipline. And based on this principle of interdisciplinarity, she develops the philosophical aspects of terminology.

Nevertheless, the approach to terminology from the perspective of Philosophy makes her establish the importance philosophy has had upon terminology since its beginnings and throughout its development. Not only because the philosophical framework in which Wüster placed himself gave origin to his conception of terms, but mostly because the evolution of philosophical thought has conditioned the conception itself of terminology as a discipline. This conditioning can be summarised briefly in a few ideas:

First, within the framework of philosophical idealism and neopositivism, terminology evolved following logic; thus, the term is conceived as a unit that represents reality and the focus of attention of terminological activity is developing the concept systems and the terms of the different disciplines following a uniformising guideline, both in the representation and the fixing of designations.

The second idea is that today, terminology lies within the framework of the Philosophy of Science, where terms are neither mere representations of reality nor simple units of language but elements participating in the construction and evolution of the discipline to which they belong. The centre of the analysis of terminology goes beyond an interest in terms as static units forming part of the concept system of a discipline; it becomes a dynamic conception which is understood as a process in which terms emerge, acquire their meaning and evolve from the development of the discipline itself, contributing significantly towards the discipline's development. Following this idea, the terms coined in a subject represent its state of knowledge, and the production of new terms assumes an evolution of thought in that discipline.

In this conception, terms are not representations of reality; rather, they are representations of thought about reality, for scientific disciplines are all abstract “constructs” of reality, sets of “constructed” concepts originating in a previous terminological stage.

The conception presented by Alexeeva sends us to the evolution that terminology has also undergone in Western Europe: how it has passed from a static conception to a dynamic conception of terms, which places terms in the centre of the production and transmission process of specialised knowledge. Terminology is thus conceived as the representation of a development stage of each specific discipline in continuous evolution.

This conception is totally coherent with the claim of the interdisciplinarity of terminology, although it does not clarify how this philosophical perspective fits in with other perspectives of terminology within a single polyhedral and multidimensional model. This is where the

“Door model” (“Modelo de las puertas”) developed by Cabré (2002) could serve as the starting point of this polyhedricity.

Alexeeva’s paper lets us see that in Russia the evolution of terminology from Philosophy is in harmony with the development this subject has undergone also elsewhere in Europe. This can be confirmed in the writings of Slodzian (1994) and, within the scope of Philosophy of Science, in J.L. Barona (1998, 2000).

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