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Centre of Expertise for Dutch Terminology: A Digital Platform for Professional Language

Abstract

When it comes to terminology, the Dutch-speaking regions have a long tradition of collaboration. Since the eighties there have been several partnerships and committees, all lead by the Dutch Language Union. There was a growing awareness that a central point was needed to bring together all information concerning Dutch terminology and to make it generally accessible. Since 2016, the Dutch Language Institute (INT) in Leiden manages and develops all Dutch language materials. The whole spectrum of language, including professional language, regional languages and dialects, is now given attention, making it no more than logical for the INT to accommodate the Centre of Expertise for Dutch Terminology (ENT). The main task of the ENT is to offer information, facilities, products and services in the field of terminology. Apart from that, research is done into the professional language of three specific fields: legal language, medical language and the language of higher education. In this article I will go deeper into the wide range of information supplied by the ENT, including specific software tools for terminological tasks. I will also describe several of the terminology projects that are being conducted at the Dutch Language Institute.

Keywords: terminology, language policy, terminology management, term extraction

1. Terminology in the Dutch-speaking regions: a short history

The Dutch-speaking regions have a long tradition of collaboration. Since the eighties there have been several partnerships and committees, all lead by the Dutch Language Union. Linguistic ideas saw significant change in the eighties. In the twentieth century, theoretical linguistics had evolved from structuralism to generative grammar, focusing on syntax. The approach to the lexicon was still rather traditional, with an emphasis on standard language, modern and historical. Because of growing internationalisation and the consequential increased demand for translators and interpreters capable of dealing with specialist texts, professional language received more and more attention, although not immediately from the side of traditional, theoretical linguistics. The Dutch Language Union realised there was a need for a consulta-

tion platform on the subject of professional language. There were two other interested parties: the Royal Netherlands Standardization Institute (then NNI, now NEN) and the Belgian Bureau for Standardisation (then BIN, now NBN). A partnership was started: the Dutch terminology group SaNT (Samenwerkingsverband voor Nederlandse Terminologie). The SaNT was working closely together in the period 1988–1996. Within this collaboration, interested parties were brought together in two groups: a ‘Language and Education’ group and a ‘Language and Business’ group.

In the series *Voorzetten* (‘proposals’) by the Dutch Language Union, two reports on terminology were published. The first report (*Voorzetten* 32) included articles on the promotion of the use of authorised terminology lists, on how to use terminology banks in businesses and government institutions, and also an article on how universities should offer ‘Terminology’ as a subject in its own right. Recommendations were written on the contents of such courses and on how research into professional language could be given shape.

As a result of these recommendations by the SaNT, all translation and interpretation courses in Flanders began to pay more attention to terminology, making it a separate subject in the curriculum. At the time, this was highly innovative, as most language courses still maintained an overwhelmingly philological approach.

This was also the time of the POINTER project. POINTER stood for ‘Proposals for an Operational Infrastructure for Terminology in Europe’ and was launched in December 1994 by the European Commission. Already then it was realised that professional language was becoming very important in European businesses and that a multilingual policy was required. “The proper and accurate use of a specialised vocabulary or ‘terminology’ is vital to successful communication in the modern world and consequently also to businesses, research and the further development of ideas. Many companies and organisations use and invent terms on a daily basis, not only in their own institutions and countries, but also across regional and national borders. Although new and frequently occurring terminology is often recorded, there is a lack of rationalisation despite our so-called ‘information society’ and hardly any efforts are made to work together to maximise the use of valuable sources.” (Cordis) The POINTER project aimed to make a set of concrete, practical proposals in order to support terminology users all over Europe by facilitating the distribution of terminologies. The emphasis of POINTER was on meeting the multilingual needs of a growing European market.

These were fascinating times: most researchers had gradually switched over from paper to working digitally and were learning to use their first PC’s. The importance of digital linguistic data to researchers and users was becoming clear. The SaNT working group ‘Language and Business’ experimented with the first digital terminology banks: Euroterm (Maastricht) and Eurodicautom (European institutions, Luxembourg, later replaced by IATE).

2. Language and economy: the importance of professional language in a busy economic region

In all activities of these two working groups, we noticed an increasing interest in professional language. Economic activity and the use of professional language are of course closely interwoven. Because of the strong economic markets in the Netherlands and Flanders, many businesses needed professional texts for customers, suppliers and technicians. These texts had to be quickly available in different languages, which

caused a need for terminology lists and later terminological databases. This phenomenon has certainly contributed to the development of a consultation platform for Dutch terminology.

The activities of the SaNT came to an end in 1996, when this collaboration was discontinued by the Language Union. As the standardisation institutes had contributed near to nothing to this initiative, the Language Union did not consider it a real partnership between the parties mentioned. The colleagues concerned, terminologists, linguists and translators who had worked well together with the SaNT, were left feeling a bit deserted and decided in 1997, on the occasion of a congress in Utrecht, to found a field association for Dutch terminology for the Netherlands and Flanders. Thus NL-Term was born, an association after the Dutch model which aimed to be a contact point for anyone involved with Dutch terminology, both its practice and its theory. In its first years NL-Term was kept afloat by volunteers and enthusiastic members of the association, without any subsidies. Later a subsidy was granted by the Language Union. NL-Term organises a congress or a workshop every year.¹

After cancelling the SaNT, the Language Union did not abandon terminology, but appointed a strategic committee which was to establish the policy and priorities for terminology in the Dutch-speaking regions. CoTerm was founded in 2006 and drew up policy decisions until 2012. It was the committee's task to advise the policy units of the Dutch Language Union on the terminology policy to be implemented within the long-term policy framework of the Language Union, to formulate projects within that framework and to carry them out or have them carried out under its own supervision. Within the committee, the exchange of expertise was promoted.

3. Towards large digital terminology collections

Eurodicautom was the pioneering terminology database of the European Commission, set up in 1975, at first to be used by translators and other employees of the Commission. By 1980 it was online accessible to the Commission. During the eighties and nineties the database grew, while it was still necessary to call in through a modem to consult the database from outside of the European Institutions. At first only Dutch, French, German and Italian were represented, the four languages of the six countries that formed the EEC (the three Benelux countries, France, Germany and Italy). When more countries joined the European Union, other languages were added, the number increasing to six, then seven, nine and eventually eleven languages (Latin was added for scientific names). Later, public user interfaces were added, giving the larger public free access to multilingual terminology related to European Union activities. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of several member states added terminology to the database. Senior terminologists worked on the inspection and creation of new entries in the existing database in different languages. In 2007, Eurodicautom was replaced by Interactive Terminology for Europe (IATE). On June 28th 2007 European institutions sent out a press release to announce three existing terminology banks were merged into a single EU terminology database: IATE, which covered 23 languages and was open to the public. Two particular features distinguish IATE from its predecessors EURODICAUTOM, EUTERPE and TIS. First of all, IATE is interactive: any translator in an EU institution can add and update information in the database. To ensure the quality of the individual contributions, a change in the database automatically launches a validation cycle: terminologists of the translation departments validate the new and modified information. Secondly, IATE is interinstitutional: its project partners are the European Parliament, the

¹ <https://www.nlterm.eu/>.

Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice, the Central Bank, the Court of Auditors, Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and the Translation Centre.

4. International initiatives and the Viennese school

Not all knowledge and insights regarding terminology came from the translation community, however. As it happens, the first steps in the theorization of terminology were made by engineers and professional experts and were strictly monolingual. It all started with the 'Viennese school', which lay the foundations of classical terminology, articulated by Eugen Wüster (1898–1977). Wüster was an Austrian engineer and the founder of terminology. He trained in electrical engineering, but was above all fascinated by the science of terminology. Living in a time when technology was developing rapidly, he asked himself questions about the way in which new concepts are reflected in language. His dissertation *Internationale Sprachnormung in der Technik, besonders in der Elektrotechnik* (Wüster 1931) was regarded a terminological standard work. He taught at the University of Vienna, where after his death the Institut für Wissenschaftstheorie und Wissenschaftsforschung and the Eugen Wüster Archive were founded. His research into technical communication resulted in the establishment of the Technical Committee for Standardization of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO/TC 37). Wüster developed the General Theory of Terminology (GTT). He was involved in Infoterm², the International Information Centre for Terminology founded in 1971 by Unesco. Infoterm aims to support and coordinate international collaboration in the field of terminology. The members of Infoterm are national, international and regional institutes, organizations and private specialists, in short, everyone who has anything to do with the standardizations and harmonization of professional language. It is a worldwide platform, with members on all continents.

Infoterm and the later founded TermNet³, the international network for terminology, will keep playing an important role in the dissemination of terminological insights, the organization of workshops and the promotion of terminology applications in businesses and governments.

Another important player in the international field is tekomp. Both tekomp Germany⁴ and tekomp Europe⁵ are very large professional associations for technical communication. Their activities are worldwide and of great importance in the world of technical and professional documentation. Again, terminology is one of their core tasks.

In the following we will specifically look into the situation regarding Dutch, especially with regard to how all data concerning terminology can be centralised and promoted.

5. The INT: treasury of the Dutch Language

In 2016, the Institute for Dutch Lexicology transformed into the more broadly oriented Dutch Language Institute. This change went hand in hand with the renewed terms of reference of the General Secretariat

2 <http://www.infoterm.info/>

3 <https://www.termnet.org/>

4 <https://www.tekom.de/>

5 <https://www.technical-communication.org/>

of the Language Union, which was to focus on policy tasks, leaving the executive tasks to the INT. To the Dutch Language Institute this transference of tasks offered the opportunity to broaden its own activities. The institute became the central point of contact regarding the keeping and maintenance of digital language materials and the safekeeping of data collections related to any variations of Dutch. This evolution reflects the strongly altered landscape of linguistic research: large language infrastructures are digitally set up and contain the corpora, dictionaries and other specialised lexicons and databases, grammar and so much more. The institute develops and provides data for dictionaries, (computational) lexicons, corpora and tools. The dictionaries are online accessible. Software and computational linguistic tools are available as open source.

The INT takes up a central position in the whole of the Dutch-speaking world (the Netherlands, Flanders, Suriname and the Caribbean) as a developer, keeper and distributor of scholarly and sustainable language resources. The institute is well-equipped for this task and has a large international network for the exchange of information with like-minded institutions. The Dutch Language Institute also provides the necessary building blocks for all language applications aimed at the development and improvement of businesses and public organisations. We intend to strengthen this role in the coming years, which is why we are focusing on the sustainable distribution of any language materials, with an emphasis on:

- (1) the Dutch vocabulary, both historical and contemporary, both standard language and the dialects, both general language and professional language;
- (2) new technologies and techniques to make the internet accessible for linguistic research and for the ongoing maintenance of constantly updated, extensive corpora of contemporary Dutch;
- (3) contribution to the accessibility of historical text material (coming from inside and outside of the INT), in which the considerable spelling variation is no longer a search impediment and ways are offered to detect and circumvent variations in word use;
- (4) use of and contribution to new computational linguistic or language technology techniques in aid of information retrieval from language materials;
- (5) formal structuring of linguistic information, making it suitable for computational linguistic applications;
- (6) further expansion of spelling information;
- (7) realisation of facilities for third parties to contribute interactively to the description of the Dutch language and the optimization of the central digital data infrastructure for this purpose;
- (8) becoming a point of contact for all language teachers and building an infrastructure of language materials that are useful and necessary for the support of teaching Dutch to various types of language learners.

6. A Clarin institute

The institute responds to the new developments in the Humanities, especially in the field of Digital Humanities. In order to fulfill this role, the INT keeps and maintains a digital infrastructure for the Dutch language, paying attention to language variation (terminology, dialects, *etc.*). Both academic and non-ac-

ademic parties can make use of this infrastructure. The INT sees a clear overlap between its own activities – the central data infrastructure – and recent developments within the eHumanities. With its own expertise, the INT contributes to the digital future of the humanities in the Netherlands and Flanders. On the one hand knowledge and products are delivered in aid of other scientific organisations, and on the other hand collaboration with the eHumanities enhances the quality of the central data infrastructure of the Dutch language. In the next years we will work closely together with centres for digital humanities at various universities and with networks such as the KNAW Humanities Cluster (Netherlands), Digital Humanities Benelux and the WOG Digital Humanities (Flanders). The INT functions as a Clarin centre for Flanders and informs Flemish researchers about the latest developments in the field of linguistic sources and the wider linguistic infrastructure in Europe (Clarin-Eric)⁶. This allows every researcher to learn more about access to repositories, standards, metadata, available corpora, the methods to encode their own corpus material, storage facilities, *etc.*

7. Language variation

That an infrastructure like the INT's can become a real digital platform of all language materials is an interesting and quite recent development. For a long time, attention both in theoretical and in applied linguistics had been focused on the general standard language, which was studied from a diachronic and a synchronic point of view. Public institutions for language were not expected to build collections of dialects, regiolects or specialist professional language.

Only when the insights into language variation changed, the step was made to a wider research field, describing the complete language spectrum with attention to all registers. From highly specialist medical terms to more common terms for medical concepts in standard language, to local speech, regional variation and informal usage: the whole range is now covered.

This means it is no more than a logical step to embed the Centre of Expertise for Dutch Terminology (ENT) in an existing institute that makes all language materials available.

8. The ENT: targets and tasks

The ENT is a junction in a wider network of relations both with the terminological field and with more general social sectors and wider user groups. Two lines of policy are being further developed:

- (1) The ENT provides diversified supporting facilities with regard to terminology, especially Dutch terminology.
- (2) The ENT positions itself in the terminological network by means of contact or collaboration with terminological associations or terminology-related institutions, both nationally and internationally.

The ENT is part of the wider INT organisation. For the sake of the recognisability of this structural connection and also to make use of the wide reputation of the INT website, the ENT has not developed a separate terminology website but uses a varied terminology page within the INT website. This terminology page contains the following features/sections, regularly kept up to date by the ENT.

⁶ <https://www.clarin.eu/>

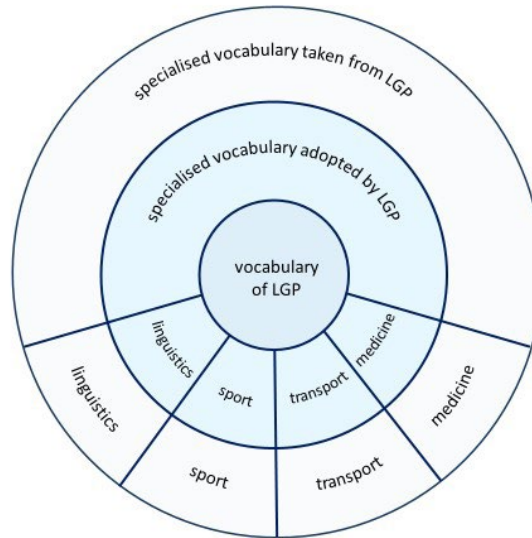


Figure 1. The connection between general language and professional language: a continuous spectrum

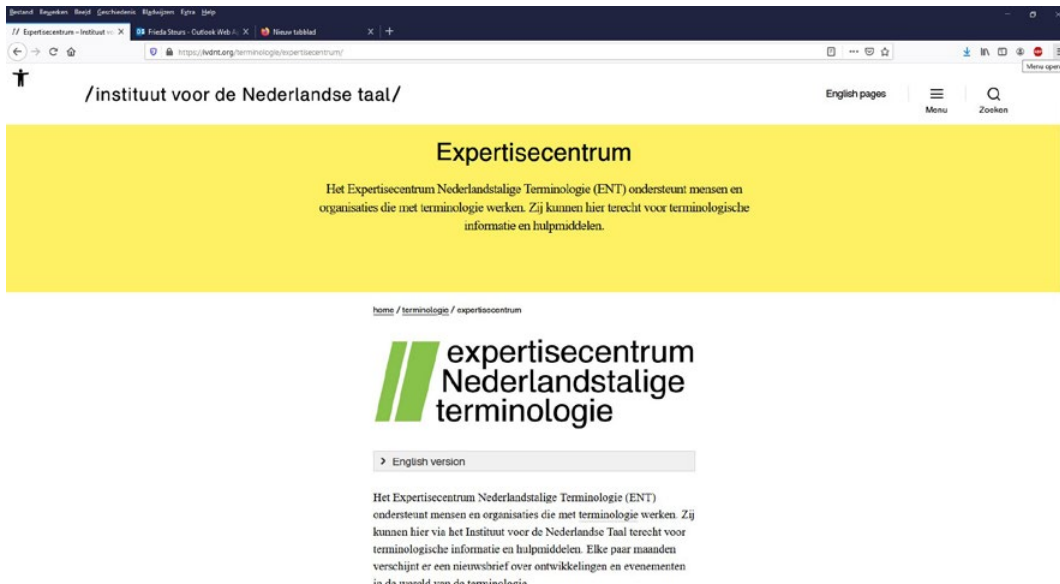


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Centre of Expertise for Dutch Terminology (ENT) website⁷

On the website, users will find a short introduction on terminology and an extensive overview of relevant sources. For those who would like to gain more in-depth knowledge, the ENT provides a bibliographical list with professional literature (manuals and theories/models) in the field of terminology.

One of the key tasks of the ENT is to make terminological collections available. The internet harbours rich terminological collections belonging to an enormous range of professional languages. Both for

⁷ <https://ivdnt.org/terminologie/expertisecentrum/>

the benefit of the professional field of terminologists, translators *etc.* and for interested people from the wider public, monolingual Dutch lists and multilingual lists featuring Dutch are being collected. These terminology collections are gradually extended and provided, along with hyperlinks. The option for users to put forward new terminological collections is in the pipeline. The ENT terminology page should be *the* place for terminological databases and dictionaries to be presented and made available with hyperlinks. To keep this collection organised and manageable, the term collections are divided according to the internationally used Library of Congress classification system. In principle, the wide angle of the ENT accommodates all professions. Terminological collections can be the result of finished projects but can also be subject to maintenance, updates or extensions.

The Centre of Expertise also maintains an overview of the software tools available for terminology control. It concerns tools that are meant for tasks such as aligning, corpus analysis, online concordances, term extraction, terminology control, translation memories with integrated terminology module, and search applications.

Two tools have been developed especially for Dutch: the TermTreffer (*'term hitter'*, for term extraction) and the TermBeheerder (*'term controller'*, for terminology management). Both applications were made under the authority of the Language Union and handed over to the INT.

The TermTreffer is a term extractor developed by the company Gridline. TermTreffer is a program for the extraction of key words (terms) from digital Dutch texts. This type of extraction software is important to translators, terminologists and developers of ICT applications. The software makes the collection and description of terminology cheaper and easier. Apart from that, it can also improve information systems: by attributing key words to texts, texts can be retrieved more easily and quickly in large digital text collections.

The TermBeheerder is a user-friendly and web-based system for terminology control, allowing users to manage various terminological databases (also called term bases or termbases). Because user roles are flexible, the Termbeheerder can be used not only by specialists but also by users less familiar with terminological work. The system contains functionality necessary to let expert users manage the termbases, including options for importing and exporting in TBX⁸ and CSV⁹.

The ENT also provides newsletters, information on terminology courses and an interactive map for the whole of Europe with terminological institutions.

We are rounding off our overview with a brief introduction to several of the ENT's specific terminology projects.

9. Several examples of specific terminology projects of the ENT

9.1. HOTNeV: Higher Education Terminology in the Netherlands and Flanders

This project was prompted by the sharp increase in educational terms generated by the EU's education policy. It was implemented by the Tuning Project.¹⁰ The Tuning project aims to promote comparability

8 TermBase eXchange (TBX) is an international standard (ISO 30042:2019)

9 CSV (comma-separated values) is a file type used for table files.

10 <http://tuningacademy.org/what-is-tuning/?lang=en>

and transparency in higher education within the EU, which includes terminology. HOTNeV has a dual purpose. Until now, Dutch equivalents for English terms were created mainly ad hoc, but this project focuses on the need to coordinate the provision of terms that have been approved by parties in the Dutch-speaking educational sector. Especially between different universities and colleges there is great confusion with regards to the use of terms for concepts related to curriculums, staff members and the general education system. This causes a great lack of clarity, both in the Dutch texts and in the English translations of the websites of these institutions.

The Dutch Language Institute participates in a partnership with the translation services of the NUT (*Nederlandse en Vlaamse Universitaire Talencentra*, Dutch and Flemish academic language centres). The working group looks into the selected terms in more detail and suggests suitable translations, which are submitted twice a year for approval or improvement to the steering group formed of members from national and international bodies. The INT also supervises internships that contribute to this project.

9.2. The Termraad and the Termraad Academy

The Termraad Nederland was set up in 2013, when the need for it was felt by the EU institutions. It is an informal consultation platform for terminological conformity within the Dutch language regions.

The Termraad Nederland is part of a terminological partnership between the Dutch Language Council and the translation services of the EU and the Dutch, Belgian and Flemish authorities.

The following institutions are represented in the core group of the Termraad Nederlands:

- European Commission
- Council of the European Union
- European Parliament
- European Court of Auditors
- Court of Justice of the European Union
- Dutch government
- Belgian government
- Flemish government
- Dutch Language Institute (INT)
- Dutch Language Union

Within the Termraad there is regular consultation about terms such as those used in higher education, in order to establish a uniform translation. Also other terms that are relevant to IATE and that are related to European policy are discussed. EU translators are expected to use language and terminology that are member state-neutral. Any ambiguity, inconsistency and doubt are to be avoided. A consistent terminology means that the same terms are always used to denote the same concepts. Dutch is, just like English, French and German, de facto a pluricentric language. Because the Netherlands and Belgium/Flanders are different societies with different forms of administration, legal and governmental traditions, and cultural and social attitudes, it is inevitable that the national varieties should reflect these differences.

9.3. The Termraad Academy

After the successful start of the Termraad, the Termraad Academy was set up, to bridge the gap between the Directorate-General for Translation and final-year students, specifically for Belgian and Dutch stu-

dents of the EMT¹¹ courses in the translation master. The Termraad Academy aims to offer students a suitable internship or an interesting subject for a Master's degree thesis. It is concerned with the collection, analysis and distribution of field-specific terminology. For Dutch universities, the INT/ENT is functioning as a host to guide these students and to show them the way in the world of terminology.

Partners are the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the Benelux Union. The Termraad Academy can help bridge the gap between Flanders and the Netherlands (and the EU) and improve collaboration between higher education and the labour market. At the same time, the IATE terminology database for Dutch profits from the many valuable additions that the project produces.

10. Conclusion

The setting up of a Centre of Expertise for Dutch Terminology has allowed us to bring together a lot of interesting information on professional language and on how the Dutch language has developed in the field of science and technology. The centre also makes it possible to build a large network together with governments, businesses, international institutions and users such as teachers and translators. Such a centre can certainly be of great extra value and maybe serve as a source of inspiration for other languages.

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11 European Master in Translation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/european-masters-translation-emt_en