This script is accompanying a Workshop on terminology policies organized by TermNet in Antwerp, 15 November 2006.

In order to better understand the challenges and advantages of a terminology policy there are 4 basic questions to be answered:

What is meant when we talk about terminology policies?
Who has a need for them?
Why should anybody care at all?
And, finally, how is such a policy formulated and implemented?

**Question 1: What is a terminology policy?**

Before we look into further details it is necessary to make sure, we have the concepts surrounding terminology policy properly defined. As it is the case with terminology per se, terminology planning is highly complex and interdisciplinary research area. It cuts across a large range of domains, like terminology science, science theory, linguistics, political sciences, administration studies, sociology, psychology, law, economics and business administration, cultural, geographic and ethnological studies, communication studies, computational sciences and Human Language Technologies (HLT), to name just the most obvious.

Terminology planning, somewhat justified, reminds of language planning. How close both fields are interrelated and where they differ from each other will also be examined in this chapter.

Wikipedia informs that under planning we understand

“the (psychological) process of creating and refining a plan, or integrating it with other plans. The term is also used to describe the formal procedures used in such an endeavor…”.

Language planning as an academic discipline is comparatively new. It came into the light of science in the late 1960s by a group of scientists from different scientific backgrounds, who got together to discuss how to address needs experienced in language communities worldwide, mainly in newly independent nations during the process of nation building. They found that in language planning not just linguistic factors play a role, but rather a combination of various disciplines from the social studies have an impact and have to be taken into consideration in and planning efforts concerning language. Many definitions emerged over the following years. None of them was completely satisfactory.

Cooper, after comparing 15 such definitions decided that in order to paying due tribute to the complexity of language planning, its definition must be as broad and inclusive as possible. His proposed definition for language planning refers to all

“… deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes”.

This definition already suggests that terminology plays an important role in these processes. Gadeli (1999) goes a step further and lists arguments for such an endeavor when he writes that

“Society is developing and language has to adjust to reality. Political decisions are taken and this may mean that new communities are created which may lack a common means of communication. In cases such as these, language planning is desirable and indeed necessary”.
If we transfer his definition to the purpose of terminology, what he refers to as new communities may include new scientific or economic communities, as indeed happens more frequently than with political entities. We only need to think of the vast number of new terms that are created in the various domains and languages and interaction levels every day. Some are ad hoc creations that vanish as soon as they emerge – some find their lexical niche and stay.

Different than in language planning which can also include spelling reform, morpho-syntactic planning or the choice of a writing system, terminology policies rely on an existing linguistic norm and a certain grammatical and orthographical stability. The concept refers to

“any conscious and systematic development of language according to the needs and requirements of domain communication.”

And here lies the main difference between language planning and terminology planning. Whereas language planning usually concerns, at various stages, the whole register and language system, terminology planning is narrower in range and stage of its application. This does not make it automatically simply a part of language planning. That’s only one possibility.

Terminology policies are, other than language policies, not so much focussed on development of languages per se. Rather, its point of departure is the development of a certain domain or subject-field, and it might therefore be much closer to scientific-technological planning. Furthermore, it concerns not only linguistic representations of concepts, although this is true in most cases. It includes in its scope all types of knowledge representations, including formulae, graphs, graphical symbols, motions, etc.

Language planning and terminology planning are two related sciences with a certain area of overlapping. Budin and Galinski suggest the term Communication planning to include both.

Any strategic planning effort is usually based on a policy. The American Heritage dictionaries offer the following definition for a policy

“a plan or course of action, as of a government, political party, or business, intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters: American foreign policy; the company’s personnel policy”.

For the purpose of this paper the above definition is favoured over other, less detailed ones, because it shows best that policies are reaching beyond public administration, as often wrongly assumed, and makes a point to mention business as a particular sphere where policies occur. Terminology policies, as a field of study on its own terms, are brand new. Theories in terminology policies are still in their infant stages. Some Infoterm documents dated back to the 1980-90s recognize the general problem without giving detailed answers how to solve it. More than 20 years later finally the timing seemed right for a new approach. On the request of UNESCO, Infoterm summoned some of the most renowned and experienced terminology and language planning experts from all over the world.
representing different cultural and professional backgrounds, to embark on the ambitious project of preparing a concise and fundamental document concerning the problem. Although the document reflects the then state of knowledge and even though it focuses mainly (though not entirely) on terminology policies in a national, public, language planning setting, it received wide recognition and even application in the communities. It has by now been translated into two further languages (more are underway) and serves as basis for further ongoing research.

How can terminology policies be pictured then? Few people can spontaneously name a particular example for a terminology policy. And yet, they exist, though in different forms and sometimes disguises. We have to be aware that in most cases a policy is established by custom. This is even the more so for terminology policies. Not all terminology policies therefore exist in written form or even as some sort of legally binding document. Theoretically, any conscious decision regarding the handling of the resource terminology can be considered as terminology policies. Even a statement like “we do not care about terminology” would therefore theoretically classify as a policy. Or better a non-policy.

But these examples are not relevant for our definition of terminology policies, which refers to written statements. A terminology policy is a

“strategy aiming at developing or regulating emerging and existing terminologies for an array of purposes”

This refers to the evident need for different types of terminological data for different user groups. Or even within the same user group different purposes and applications may require very different degrees of complexity and detail. For this reason it is advisable to conceive the terminology policy non-exclusive (regarding multilingual, multimodal and multimedia issues).

Terminology policies can take a variety of forms and styles. They can be laws, decrees, official statements or recommendations, speeches, guidelines or briefing papers. How the policy eventually looks like is determined by and large by the complexity of the environment which it needs to serve. They have in common that they are in one way or the other authoritative.

Often statements concerning terminology are part of broader policies on more general, related topics within the parent organization. They can appear in policies and regulations of very different areas (e.g. technology transfer policy, health policy, cultural policy), which do not normally coordinate their work. Costly, fragmented, uncoordinated, unexpressed and contradictory actions can be the result. Some synchronization, harmonization or at least awareness of these actions would optimize overall operation. Any synergies that can be created through this, sharing of resources, mutual support, or, in the best but least likely case, cooperative striving for the common goal could lead a way out of chaos and boost development processes.

We have seen so far that policy making is a complex process and is constantly influenced by an array of factors, such as demographic, cultural, ethno- and geo-linguistic factors, socio-psychological factors, economic factors or legal factors. Neither of which can be neglected lest to endanger the success of the policy. It is therefore crucial to seek external advise on areas where own expertise is missing. Even more important is the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible, based on a proper and thorough stakeholder analysis. It does not imply that all stakeholders should be involved on equally. This is quite impossible, and counterproductive. But it is essential to take into account all the different interests. Only this way consensus and eventually ownership of the policy can be reached.

**Question 2: Who needs a terminology policy?**

Reviewing the definitions above, we have seen that terminology policies are not only horizontally cross-cutting through various domains, but also vertically they are displaying certain diversity. We have to understand that terminology does not only affect selected professional groups, such as translators, even though this community appears to be most concerned with it, at least in terms of research and education and training. As a matter of fact, translation comes into play only at a quite advanced stage in the life-cycle of terminology.
The UNESCO Guidelines for terminology policies describe the omnipresence of terminology in saying, that:

"Terminology plays crucial role whenever domain-specific knowledge is

- Generated (research, development)
- Used (specialized texts)
- Recorded (databases, dictionaries)
- Passed on (training, teaching)
- Implemented (technology and knowledge transfer)
- Translated and interpreted."

Or as one expert jokingly put it

"Terminology is like snoring – everybody does it, only some are aware of the fact, and of those, even fewer would admit it."

These statements enlarge the user group for terminology policies considerably. In a rough typology we can differentiate between policies

- on the national level,
- in a corporate/institutional level in a commercial setting and such
- on the corporate/institutional non-commercial/domain specific setting.

National terminology policies have already enjoyed some detailed explanation above as well as in other places. If a nation embarks on terminology policies it is done usually with the goal of developing one or more languages to serve as full-functional means of communication. It is then usually part of a language policy. In rarer cases, or independently from existing language policies, the nation might approach the issue from another viewpoint of social development, such as in the health sector or scientific-technological development.

The latter reasoning might be dominant for institutions of the civil society, either non-governmental or international organizations. These organizations usually represent a very specific domain and a tight mandate but a vast geographical, cultural and socio-political diversity. For their purpose, language development plays almost no role and the approach is strictly functional. A terminology policy here has to consider additional factors such as different legal environment, political sensitivities.

Still different from these two types are requirements in commercial applications of terminology. A company’s first goal is to make profit. This primary goal subsumes all decisions taken with regard to terminology. Multilingualism, diversity, CSR, localization and translation, knowledge management, workflow, branding and corporate identity, customer service and information are all obstacles to be managed with as little effort as possible along the way. Depending on the market sector of the company it will have a need for a terminology policy for legal reasons, this is particularly true in sectors which pose a high risk and liability factor, like pharmaceutics, transportation or safety devices.

The above serves as a rough model, a tool to help us visualize the complex underlying motivations. It is no 1:1 representation of reality. In “wild nature” we will find all sorts of mixed types. It is important to be aware that there can never be one model policy to be copied unedited to all situations. There are as many terminology policies as there are needs for them, and each must be custom-made for its very own circumstances.
Question 3: Why are terminology policies useful?

This question is perhaps the most often asked in connection with terminology policies, and justifiably so. And it is not new either. The debate is as old as there is deliberate and conscious language-intervention and manipulation: Can and should language be planned? The answer is similar for most language experts:

Language and terminology development is a natural phenomenon and as such it develops after its own organic and society-determined rules, only controllable to some extend. Where there is a need to communicate about a certain issue, there will be a way. This can not be denied. The argument is about whether use efforts and resources to channel these developments in a particular direction and thus interfere in, manipulate, human behaviour?

To answer this question one must reconsider the goal. To function in the ICT-controlled information society certain harmonization or even standardization is absolutely necessary for any language. This starts with a standard writing system, a harmonized orthography and impacts terminology as well. Admittedly, this happens at different degrees in the various domains – less in sociology, humanities and the fine arts and highly restricted in technical fields and natural science in order to avoid synonyms and give exact definitions for a clear and unambiguous communication.

So we can see that planning efforts are necessary in order to develop a language to function in science and technology.

Planning also includes regulations about the use of a linguistic variety in a certain domain (in international air travel the use of (controlled) English is given preference to the use of local languages, even though English might not be part of the linguistic inventory of the country or company the airline in question belongs to).

Planning has an impact on status and self-esteem of a linguistic community or even concrete questions on terminology management methodology.

Science and technology are the basis for economic and societal development. On the other hand, economic development has a direct psychological impact on the status of a language in society. A person, whose primary language (the language s/he speaks and understands best) is reduced to the use in private sphere and folklore, and who is forced to conduct all domain-specific communication, which is about 80% of communication in total, in a language they master insufficiently, because their own language is not equipped for it, are in a disadvantaged position and very well aware of it (so-called language grief).

The above is a cyclic process of inter-dependence between Information, development, market demands and investment. In order to break this cycle timely access for citizens to information and their transferring this information into knowledge are the precondition.

In order to enable all languages to develop to equally equipped means for communication, knowledge transfer and the base for development of the society they belong to, systematic planning has to take place. Be it to produce comparable statistics for a multitude of uses in science and development or the general notion of bridging the digital divide – all these are impossible endeavours without terminology planning.

So while in a short term view all-embracing terminology policies might indeed slow down development, especially in domains or sectors that need to react timely to rapid changes – in order to reach an advanced stage of (semantic) interoperability in the medium to long-term strategy, a synchronized evolution of activities is fundamental.
It is relatively safe to assume that in the great majority of cases those who are entrusted with the task of developing a terminology policy are not very experienced in policy-making or strategic planning. With some luck that person has some experience and understanding of management processes.

But in most cases it is probably a specialist of other disciplines, who will be in charge or initiating the process, if not carrying it out mainly on his/her own, e.g. a terminologist, or somebody working in a translation department, or even a subject-specialist with very little knowledge about the peculiarities of terminology, e.g. health-care specialists, risk managers.

And in the course of the new task s/he faces the questions all policy-makers, no matter where they come from, have to think of:

- How to create a social environment that is appreciative towards a terminology policy?
- How to identify goals, needs, concepts and the coverage of the terminology policy?
- What does the workflow for the formulation and implementation of a terminology policy look like?
- How to identify and involve all the necessary interest groups in order to gain their support, benefit from their input and reach consensus?
- How to make sure the policy is implemented well and sustainable?

This chapter suggests a rough workflow to policy formulation and implementation. It is important to note that each policy will address different needs and will have to work under different circumstances and environments and by and for different people. There can therefore not be a single recipe which can be applied everywhere, but it can offer rough pillars and tools from management theory and policy studies that have proven valuable under certain circumstances. It is helpful to know them in any case, even if one might not need to apply them in one’s own work process.

Furthermore, some knowledge about basic principles in communication, psychology and sociology can dramatically improve the quality and the success of the terminology policy. One of the most important things before starting is a sound knowledge bureaucratic and technocratic paths and particularities of the environment one is working in. If the policy maker does not have these experiences because s/he is new to the institution or even an external contracted person, teaming up with somebody who has deep inside knowledge (and good contacts to the various departments) is a possible solution.

In the ideal world model, policy-making is a linear and driven by reasonable decisions, thought-through process. It assumes that the policy process starts at a certain point and is developed from there in a linear and chronological way. Furthermore it assumes straightforward, uninterrupted political or bureaucratic ways and somewhat evenly strong distributed interests among the stakeholder groups.

**PHASE 1**  
Preparation

**PHASE 2**  
Formulation

**PHASE 3**  
Implementation

**PHASE 4**  
Sustained operation, adaptation mechanism

Graph 2 Linear or common-sense model

This model is by far not reflecting how such processes look like in real life. Policy-making is really a complex, multi-dimensional process that resembles the universal network structure of multiple nodes which are all linked directly or indirectly, some nodes having plentiful linking, thus representing the most complex constituent of the net, so-called hubs. And since the universal law of systems or network theory teaches us that everything is connected to everything else, various “external” factors have their influence, too. We also have to consider the more circular and irregular workflow than as appears in the linear model. Some factors that can influence policy-making can not always be influenced or even predicted (political or economic change). Therefore, and for the sake of simplicity I will keep along the lines suggested by the linear model. Nevertheless, the complex network structure should be kept in mind to understand and constantly be reminded of its complexity.
We will now have a closer look at phase one of the policy-making, the preparation phase. This phase is the one which is often neglected, pushed aside or pursued halfheartedly. But matter of fact, a thorough and inclusive preparation is the Alpha and the Omega, as it is the basis upon which all further steps have to be built. Besides providing the necessary knowledge needed to make policy related decisions it also prepares the ground for a successful launch and implementation, because in this phase already stakeholder involvement starts and through contacts made in this phase the support structure necessary for all further steps is gained.

It is however often assumed by policy-maker, especially when they are experts in the field in question, to have enough insight and overview and knowledge skip this phase. This assumption, be aware, may prove fatally wrong.

A good preparation phase should include the following steps:

- Stakeholder analysis
- Awareness raising/ PR
- Survey of the state of the art
- Compilation and creation of preliminary documents
- Consultation process.

One of the most valuable steps is the stakeholder analysis. According to a definition by the World Bank,

“(a) stakeholder is any entity with a declared or conceivable interest or stake in a policy concern.
The range of stakeholders relevant to consider for analysis varies according to the complexity of
the reform area targeted and the type of reform proposed and, where the stakeholders are not
organized, the incentive to include them. Stakeholders can be of any form, size and capacity.
They can be individuals, organizations, or unorganized groups. In most cases, stakeholders fall
into one or more of the following categories: international actors (e.g. donors), national or political
actors (e.g. legislators, governors), public sector agencies (…), interest groups (e.g. unions,
medical associations), commercial/private for-profit, nonprofit organizations (NGOs, foundations),
civil society members, and users/consumers.”

This definition describes the universal and principally non-restrictive nature of stakeholders. Anybody can be a potential stakeholder, and, most important for success, they should be treated as such. This does not mean that everybody should receive the same kind and extend of attention. This would simply be impossible. Moreover, if treated in an inappropriate way, it can be counterproductive. One has to be aware that each stakeholder represents his/her own or a third party’s interest. These can be in conflict with each other.

Like any policy, a terminology policy can only be successful if a sense of ownership can be created and consensus be reached. Therefore the importance of a stakeholder analysis as early as possible after the decision to engage in a terminology policy can not be stressed enough.

From business management studies (though, increasingly, they find their way into policy making as the above quoted World Bank document demonstrates) we know a number of tools and methods to visualize the roles and assist in finding adequate treatment strategy for the different types of stakeholders. These tools all follow more or less the same principles: First, in a brainstorming exercise, as many of them as possible will be identified. In a second step the degree and type of impact on the terminology policy will be established. Also, as far as possible, their anticipated attitude (positive or negative or indifferent) will be noted along with particular points of interest or arguments.

All these facts and data can be visualized in graphs and continua, according to which individual strategies of treatment can be established. These can range from “keep informed” via “keep satisfied” to “include and monitor closely.”
Equally important in the preparation of a policy is the next step: A survey about the state-of-the-art of terminology issues in the company, organization or language community. Evidence-based policy-making is still rather the exception than the norm, for the above mentioned reasons but also due to lacking resources to conduct such a survey. Considering the many perhaps unidentified activities or resources (terminology initiatives or products in other departments, companies, states…) and the need to evaluate shortcomings and state an inclusive goal that is shared by everybody this data collection is absolutely helpful. At least a minimum should be invested in some secondary research. It will also serve at a later stage to the preparation of arguments and messages to be used in awareness raising campaigns and negotiations with decision makers and other stakeholders. The survey should include facts on the

- general environment (diversity, development)
- language and terminology environment (existing applications, infrastructure, gaps)
- existing related policies (find inconsistencies, overlapping, appropriate style, find supporting argumentation)
- benchmarking, best case studies, analysis of foreign experiences

With the results of this survey a number of preliminary documents should then be prepared. The more carefully their preparation is carried out, the less effort need to be put later into the compilation of and re-use in information material of a variety of forms and purposes. These documents should be as authoritative as possible and include

- results from the survey (knowledge-brokered or “translated” for the understanding of lay people)
- broad policy statement: general goals, need and issues to be incorporated
- other (e.g. institutional profiles, procedural aspects, participants)

On the basis of these documents a consultation process must now take place, which can take various forms (conference, round table, interviews, or questionnaires) which will result in the formulation of the final version of the terminology policy. Again, the more careful the preparation phase, the more founded the arguments will be. Similarly, the more attention is invested in the involving of stakeholders and the more focused the awareness campaign among the larger community, the shorter and less problematic the formulation phase will be. This is so, because a certain amount of commitment to the success and ownership of the final product has already been reached along the way.

Once the final policy has been approved by decision makers, its implementation can begin. Implementation is the highest goal, the reason why a policy is formulated at all. Therefore it deserves special focus and careful attention. Implementation is the stage where many policies eventually fail. The reasons for failure are manifold, lacking commitment, insufficient coordination and awareness, losing momentum and interest or financial reasons. Implementation is in many ways the reverse action to policy making. It is its translation into concrete actions. And for this a detailed and goal-driven implementation plan or action plan is crucial, which should be coordinated through a priory established mechanism (e.g. committee).

Again, an action plan is based on the results of the survey from phase one, and assigns areas of priority and roles, establish programs and specific interventions. Budgetary allocations will be made. The action plan is the basic operational, organizational and procedural guideline for the implementation and serves as a reference in the evaluation and monitoring process. Along with the programs and action lines, awareness-raising and change management activities have high priority in its development. The more fundamental or consequential the change a terminology policy implies, the more difficult its implementation is likely to be. The stakeholder analysis already should be based on the awareness that
there is a reluctance to change in all spheres and levels of society. Change management and other tools 17
In this case, taking small steps towards the envisaged change is to preferred to the “shock therapy” approach. Small improvements should be treated as the big success they indeed are. Change means a threat to most people. Therefore it creates fear. This fear must be taken from them. It is necessary to talk to them, explain, demonstrate, that change means positive things to them. It is essential to empower them through training and appropriate incentives to cope with the new situation. The more transparent the policy process and the greater the involvement of some of them, previously identified opinion leaders and change agents, the fewer the problems that are likely to be encountered afterwards.

A policy is an ongoing process and is not finished at a certain point, as is the case with projects. It is therefore part of each policy process to make provisions for sustained operation based on monitoring and regular evaluation, as well as adaptation processes. A good implementation plan includes programs directed towards capacity building, facilitating and stimulating research, the creation and promotion of adequate and responsible institutions, working groups, networks, fosters (international) cooperation and continued awareness raising activities. This way only a constant interest and knowledge as well as the necessary flexibility to react on a changing and developing environment can be guaranteed. Through frequent monitoring and regular evaluation of the policy, carried out by a specially designated independent group its success or failure can be estimated and necessary actions for the improvement of the situation can be taken.

Summary and what is to come

Summarizing the paper we can say that the most important principles for creating and running a successful terminology policy are the following

1) **Invest in thorough preparation**
2) **Learn from experiences of others**
3) **Include stakeholders – create commitment and ownership**
4) **Collaborate as extensively and intensively as possible, employ participatory work methods wherever feasible**
5) **Start capacity building for empowerment and sustainability as early as possible**
6) **Create awareness in the community (language community, department, company…)**

Furthermore it is advisable to always keep an eye on state-of-the-art in research, management tools, ICT developments to improve access to resources and collaborative working, shifting stakeholders’ perspectives, political and economic developments, etc.

And not to forget:  
→ be realistic!
→ think universal (network/systemic)!

The recommendations given in this short paper can not be exhaustive and deeper exploration of the various issues and tools is necessary for a policy process, according to individual requirements. Further research into real applications and case studies will provide more detailed insight into the special requirements of terminology policies. In particular empirical data are needed to assist policy makers making correct analysis and provide them with facts for argumentation, guides them in taking the right decisions and developing of concrete actions and, last but not least, serve as success indicators for policy evaluation purposes. Increasing demand expressed from many different user groups of terminology indicates that results are needed fast.

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For instance, Oxford English Dictionary describes policy as “a course or principle of action, adopted or proposed by an organization or individual”. Similarly, Collins Gem dictionary defines policies as “Plan of action, adopted by a person, group or state”, or even more unspecified “commitment to a goal, guide for action”. Both definitions are agreeable in their breadth.

For instance, Galinski, Christian; Budin Gerhard; de V. Cluver, A.D. (1999) Terminologieplanung und Sprachplanung.


Felber, H. (1986) Guidelines on national terminology planning policy in developing countries and countries with not developed terminology work.

Galin, Christian (1994) Fachsprachen- und Terminologiepolitik in Europa

Budin, Gerhard (1993b) Practical Issues in Multilingual Terminology Planning


National is not used here synonymously with nation-state but can also refer here to any culturally and/or linguistically distinct group, either on local, regional or nation-state level.

CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility, movement in business to take into account a certain responsibility concerning society and environment and give something back to it.