

A FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE SPEECH PATHOLOGY TERMS

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Due to the complex evolution and diverse parentage of speech pathology, the terminology in the area is sometimes vague, inappropriately defined and used inconsistently. Numerous terminology projects have attempted to develop consensus scientific definitions for speech pathology terms, but have failed to have a sustained measurable impact. The Dynamic Terminology Framework represents a new approach to terminology which involves the development of criteria for terms, rather than a list of standard terms. The framework provides the conceptual basis for identifying all the relevant parameters that influence terms, subsequently leading to a set of criteria for the analysis of speech pathology terms.

Keywords:

framework,
human communication,
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Introduction

Speech Pathology Australia's Terminology Frameworks Project (2005 to 2007) set out to explore the complex issues presented by terminology. It resulted in an extensive publication entitled *Criteria for the Analysis of Speech Pathology Terms: Challenges and a Methodology* (Speech Pathology Australia, 2008). The aim of that publication is to provide speech pathologists with a methodology to select and use effective terms for a range of purposes in their daily practice by employing a theoretical framework as the basis for making decisions regarding: the selection of appropriate terms; and criteria for terms and definitions.

Criteria for the Analysis of Speech Pathology Terms does not present a simple answer to the problems of terminology. Rather, it presents a tool (a framework) for professionals to use as they explore terms and think about the issues; thus it requires readers to engage with new concepts, to take a new perspective on terminology, and to be willing to reflect on their own use of terms in practice. It explores:

- n issues and assumptions about terminology;
- n a dynamic view of terms and terminology;
- n a new conceptual model of human communication;
- n the wide range of purposes for which terms are used in the profession;
- n the analysis of terms through the application of criteria;
- n some common problems with terms used for particular purposes.

This article is derived from the complete report which is available on the Association website at <http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/Content.aspx?p=191>. Readers are invited to access the original document for a fuller exploration of the issues and concepts presented in this article.

Why is terminology such a problem?

The terminology in the field of speech pathology has been described as inconsistent, variable, inadequate, a mess and in a state of chaos (Rockey, 1980; Schindler, 1990; Wollock, 1997; Kamhi, 1998). One term may have several different meanings, while several terms can be used with the same meaning. Think of the enormous range of terms to label children's language problems including language disorder, language impairment, language delay, specific language impairment and semantic-pragmatic disorder. Many authors have proposed definitions of these terms, but these also vary. This inconsistency leads to many questions: How do professionals select from this range of terms? What makes one term "better" than another? What makes a "good" definition? How does the profession create appropriate new terms when they are needed?

The broad question is: Can the appropriateness and consistency of terms in speech pathology be improved? Many respected writers in the field have bemoaned the lack of consistency and suitability of terms. Kamhi (1998, p. 35) suggested that "it is unrealistic to expect ... consistent terminology" but then appealed for at least some "logic to the inconsistency" (p. 36). Professionals have devoted extensive time and energy attempting to improve terminology in the past, but this does not seem to have had a sustained or significant impact on the situation (Walsh & IGOTF-CSD, 2006).

Wollock (1997) has explored the earliest documented studies of communication disorders in great detail. Aristotle's classification system was based on observable communicative behaviours while Galen's classification system was based on the putative underlying causes of the communication problems (Wollock, 1997). However these two incompatible systems were amalgamated over time and, with mistranslations from the original Greek and Latin compounding the problem, evolved into a terminology which Rockey (1980) described as in state of chaos. Modern-day speech pathology has inherited a terminology "mess" that has developed over 3000 years (Rockey, 1980; Wollock, 1997).

Contemporary speech pathology sits at the interface of linguistics, psychology and medicine and its development has been influenced by trends in these disciplines over the last 100 years (Sonninen & Damsté, 1971; Tanner, 2006). Each of these is a separate discipline, based on differing fields of study. As a result of its diverse "professional" parentage, contemporary speech pathology has derived terms from a range of different disciplines, rather than from a unified science of human communication.

Due to this complex evolution and diverse parentage, the terminology of speech pathology is sometimes vague, inappropriately defined and used inconsistently (AIHW, 2003). Over the last 40 years numerous classification projects, standardisation projects and translation projects have attempted to develop consensus scientific definitions for speech pathology terms (Schindler, 2005). However, no projects have come to light which have attempted to address the underlying causes



Regina Walsh

of inconsistency and lack of appropriateness in terms, and no projects seem to have considered the wide range of different purposes for which professionals need suitable terms.

Standard terms versus standards for terms

The belief that a standardised list of terms will address the terminology issue is widespread. While professionals might believe a list of terms will “sort out the mess”, such lists have been developed and implemented without measurable impact on the profession (Kjaer, 2005). Bain (2005) pointed out that while it may seem intuitively appealing or logical to address a terminology problem with a list of better defined terms, this approach fails to connect in any real way with the users of terms in their everyday professional practice, and may in fact merely result in terminology proliferation.

An alternative approach to finding a solution to the field’s terminology problems is to establish “standards” or criteria for terms and definitions. Such criteria should be based on a thorough understanding of the professional practice schema of speech pathology, and need to support both consistency in the underlying meaning of the term and flexibility in how a term is actualised in different contexts. To achieve this, the profession needs:

- n to articulate an accurate representation of how terms work within the professional practice schema (Bain, 2005);
- n to ensure that terms and definitions meet agreed criteria (Rockey, 1969);
- n to be able to use terms appropriate for the various purposes needed and the various contexts of practice (Walsh, 2005);
- n to refer to a robust mechanism to share the underlying meaning of the varying terms across these contexts and purposes (Madden & Hogan, 1997).

Developing criteria for terms is completely different from developing a list of standard terms. Criteria refer to information about terms: they set the parameters for the analysis and discussion of terms among professionals. They would provide the basis for professionals to adopt the most appropriate term according to criteria that are agreed to across the profession, thus promoting consistency. Establishing and implementing criteria for terms is an approach which closely involves the professionals, aiming to improve their knowledge and understanding about the principles and criteria for effective terminology.

A dynamic view of terminology

The prevailing view of terminology could be called a “static” view. A static view of terminology holds that a term refers to a thing or an idea, the Referent, which has a single “correct” definition determined by a process of scientific investigation and professional consensus about “the essence” of this Referent. This view, illustrated in figure 1, has dominated terminology literature and project work for decades.

However, this view does not necessarily represent how terms work in practice (Bain, 2005). It ignores a number of other influences on terms, such as the various purposes for referring to human communication and the contexts and cultures within which speech pathologists practice. These all influence the features of an appropriate term and effective definition.

Taking such parameters into account allows the development of a more realistic and dynamic view of terminology. In a “dynamic” view of terminology the Referent remains a key parameter with other parameters also acknowledged: each term is used for a Purpose by Users, within a Culture and in a

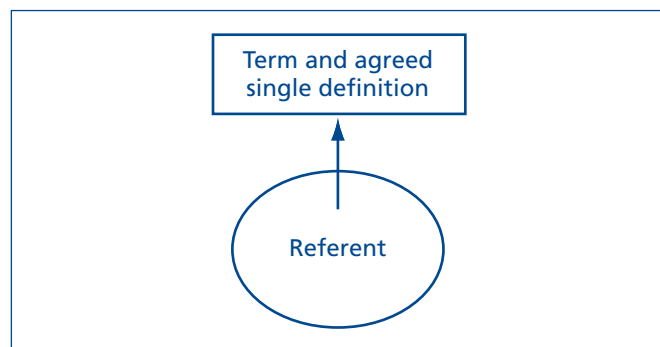


Figure 1: A static view of terminology

Context. Thus, an appropriate term with an effective definition reflects the influence of the five parameters of:

- n the Referent – the thing or idea within communication to which a term refers;
- n the Purpose – the reasons for using the term in various roles and activities;
- n the Users – all the people who need to use and understand the term;
- n the Culture – the (pertinent) value system of the people who use the term; this can relate to the broader culture of a geographical region or country, or to the subculture of a group of users, such as the subculture of speech pathology;
- n the Context – the environment in which a role or activity takes place; this can relate to the workplace or to the legislative or policy context.

Therefore, a dynamic view of terminology links a term to the “system” within which it functions, as in figure 2. Each of the five parameters requires specific criteria for terms and definitions. For example, a term must be accessible to all identified Users and a term must be relevant to the Context. Within a dynamic view of terminology, terms are viewed as appropriate or inappropriate, i.e., they do or do not meet the criteria for terms for that purpose.

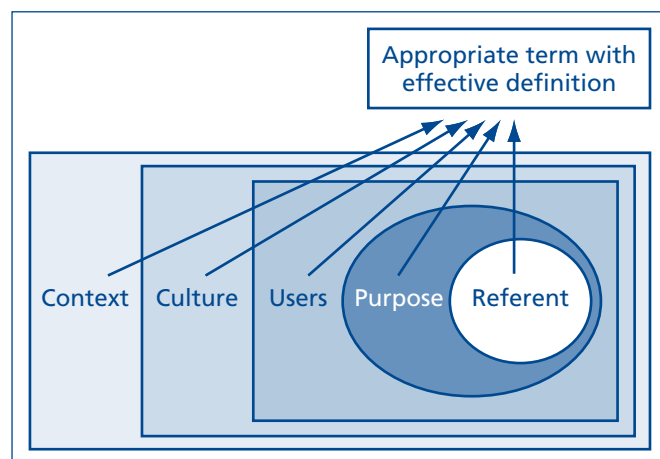


Figure 2: A dynamic view of terminology

A Dynamic Terminology Framework

A dynamic view is the basis for a unifying framework for terminology that recognises and integrates all the parameters. The Dynamic Terminology Framework, presented in figure 3, illustrates the synergy between all the relevant parameters:

- n on the left-hand-side of the Framework is a conceptual model of human communication which provides the basis for the Referent for each term. A preliminary conceptual model for human communication is presented in the full document;

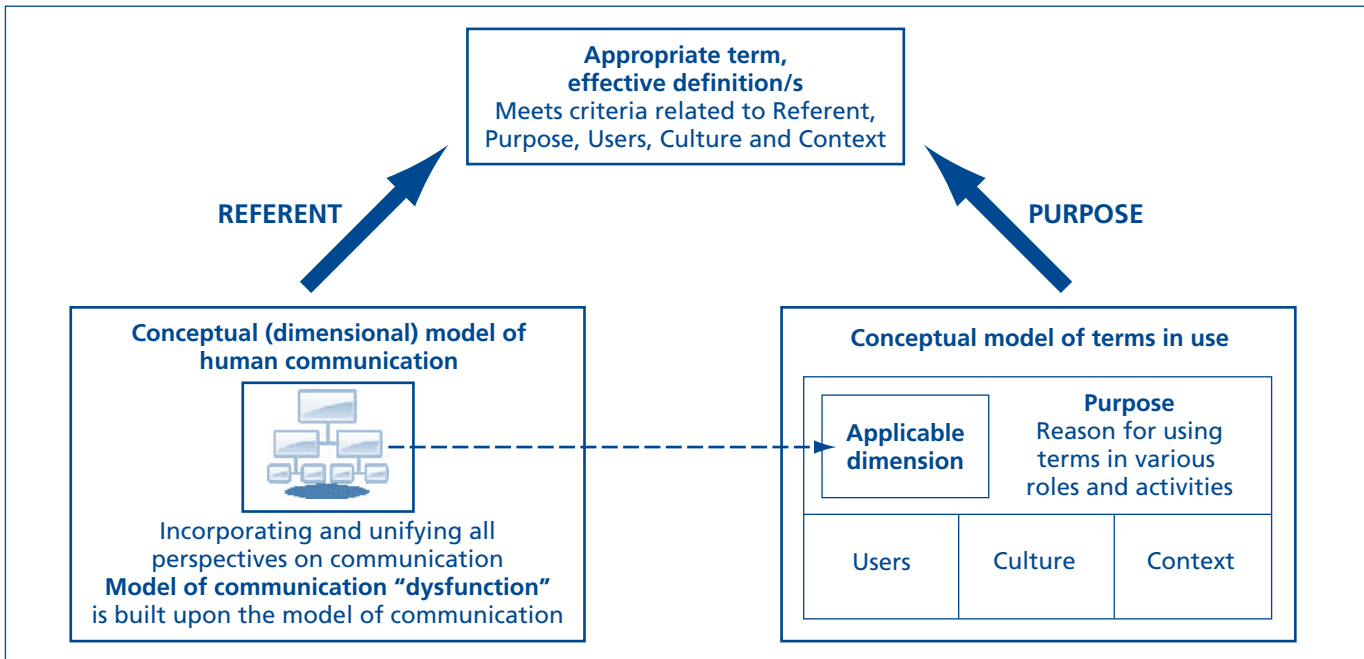


Figure 3. Dynamic Terminology Framework

on the right-hand-side of the Framework is a conceptual model of terms in use. Each term can be considered according to the Purpose, the Users, Culture and Context. These parameters are discussed further in the full document.

The Framework highlights the importance of the range of different Purposes for terms within the speech pathology professional practice schema. The Purpose for which a term is used represents a previously overlooked but critical aspect of the appropriateness and effectiveness of terms, and a central aspect of making progress in improving terminology for the field.

The Dynamic Terminology Framework provides the basis for the application of a logical and rigorous methodology for projects and activities seeking solutions to current terminology issues. The Framework therefore provides a tool for the analysis of terms; it does not provide simple answers or the actual terms for speech pathologists to use. The Framework:

- n provides the profession with a comprehensive tool with which to begin the journey through the terminology "mess";
- n assists professionals to work methodically through the numerous and complex issues which surround terms;
- n supports the development of a mature profession through a firm conceptual basis for the scope and development of its terminology.

Before there can be real improvement in terminology, professionals must change their own thinking and behaviour regarding terms and terminology. The Framework provides the basis for reflecting upon and analysing the way that terms are used, and presents some challenges to the views that professionals may hold about terms.

Essential conditions and criteria

The Dynamic Terminology Framework leads to a methodology for the analysis of terms which entails applying an essential condition and several criteria for each of the five parameters. The essential conditions refer to the beliefs or principles of the professionals regarding terminology, while the criteria relate to the qualities and features of the terms. The essential conditions are critical for effective terminology work, as without them, professionals may approach terminology

projects from different or even conflicting perspectives. The criteria for terms related to the parameters of the Referent, the Purpose, the Users, the Culture and the Context are explained in the full document. Many of the criteria refer to concepts which may be unfamiliar to speech pathologists (such as the importance of the distinction between "entities" and "constructs"); therefore an in-depth exploration of the criteria is beyond the scope of this brief article.

Table 1 presents a matrix of the five essential conditions and the 16 criteria for analysing terms related to the five parameters of the Dynamic Terminology Framework. Refer to the full document for a detailed explanation.

Application

The Dynamic Terminology Framework and the matrix in Table 1 can be applied to identify the features and criteria of terms for a particular Purpose so as:

- n to decide if a term under analysis is suitable for the Purpose;
- n to identify/select available appropriate terms (and definitions) for this Purpose;
- n to craft new terms (and/or definitions) for this Purpose if needed (with the benefit of a rationale shared by the profession);
- n to explore the features and criteria for terms for a particular Purpose for discussion about these features and criteria amongst colleagues;
- n to analyse a controversial term to investigate the source of the issue;
- n to analyse a particular Purpose to identify the challenges for the profession, and clarify why certain terms may or may not be appropriate;
- n to explain a particular Purpose of a term to those unfamiliar with this Purpose.

Once the Purpose for which a term is to be used is identified (for example, the Purpose might be public relations or making a diagnosis), the available terms can be analysed to determine if they do or do not meet the criteria for terms for this Purpose. Several worked examples are presented in the full document.

The analysis of terms according to the Dynamic Terminology Framework presents a challenge to many current beliefs and

A term ... Has a Referent	For a Purpose	Of Users	Within a Culture	In a Context
Essential condition	Essential condition	Essential condition	Essential condition	Essential condition
The Referent is derived from a shared model of communication	Purposes are representative of the range of activities/roles in professional practice schema	Identified Users are considered as being of equal status	Culture is linked to the identified Users and considered at between cultures, broad culture or sub-culture level	Context is identified as central (not an add-on) to the appropriateness of terms
Criteria related to Referent	Criteria related to Purpose	Criteria related to Users	Criteria related to Culture	Criteria related to Context
The definition is concise and predictable	The Referent comes from the applicable dimension for the Purpose	The term and definition are accessible to all identified users	The term and definition are acceptable within the broad culture, particularly to those who are labelled by them	The term and definition are relevant to the context
The definition is a positive affirmative statement of the Referent	The definition is suitable for the nature of the phenomenon, which itself must be appropriate for the Purpose		The term and definition have appropriate features for the culture or subculture	The term and definition take into account the impact of influences outside speech pathology
The definition is linear and clarifying; it avoids circularity (self-reference)	The definition reflects the directness of observation, which itself must be appropriate for the Purpose			
The definition provides new information; it avoids tautology	The type of definition is suitable for the purpose			
The definition is precise and coextensive with the Referent	The role of the definition is suitable for the purpose			
Part of speech parity exists between the term and the first key word of the definition				

practices. Working on terms and terminology entails exploring one's own professional values, beliefs and practices.

Conclusion

Developing a unifying framework for the analysis of terms which is shared across the profession is an important step in addressing the problems around terms in the field. Through establishing principles and criteria for terminology to which the profession agrees, the aim is to make a positive impact, over time, on the normal dynamic processes of the evolution of terms within the professional practice schema.

The implications of the Dynamic Terminology Framework include:

- n Everyone "owns" the terminology of the profession; everyone is likewise responsible for its improvement;
- n The challenge is for professionals to change their behaviour with terms (it is not necessarily the terms that need to change);
- n Terminology analysis is extremely complex and demands attention to more than "what" is being labelled by terms (the Referent);
- n Terms and definitions should be assessed according to specific criteria which are agreed to by the professional community;
- n Terms can be viewed as appropriate or inappropriate for a particular Purpose, i.e., meeting or not meeting the criteria for that Purpose;
- n Terms for some Purposes must vary across Contexts and Cultures even when referring to the same thing; attempting to standardise the actual terms or to use a single set of terms for the field ignores the dynamic synergy involved in the professional practice schema;
- n Terminology problems can stem from numerous sources; the Dynamic Terminology Framework leads the profession to look at the many sources of terminology problems more broadly than previously;
- n Appropriate and consistently-used terms will be developed through the normal processes of professional analysis and discourse when professionals apply knowledge of the dynamic nature of terms in practice and think about the important criteria for terms and definitions.

Almost 40 years ago, Rockey (1969, p. 175) urged the profession to consider terminology "as a specialised field of study requiring as much research and thought as other specialities". This call has remained largely unanswered, but it is as insightful and urgent today as it was then. Some authors (e.g., Tanner, 2006) have explored the contribution of philosophical enquiry to the development and future advancement of the field, including its terminology. The profession needs to "step outside itself" to reflect on its values and its choices related to terminology to foster the development of a mature profession.

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