

Symposium: Terminology in Communication Sciences and Disorders – A New Approach

Title: Future directions in terminology

Presenters

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This paper will be presented by members of the International Group on Terminology Frameworks – Communication Sciences and Disorders (IGOTF-CSD). It addresses the third of the aims for the symposium:

- To consider future directions in terminology.

This paper is not a research paper; its aim is to foster discussion and a commitment to action amongst the field. It draws on a review of the literature, work done by Speech Pathology Australia to develop terminology frameworks, and the ongoing work of the IGOTF-CSD aimed at improving the terminology of the field. For this paper the following terms will be used:

- *Terminology* refers to the whole broad area of clinical terminologies; definitions, classification, nomenclatures, ontology, and to the critical study of terms themselves;
- *Term* refers to words with specific meaning in a specific context;
- A *definition* is a statement which manifests what a thing is or what its name signifies.

The *Framework of Terminology Use* aims to assist professionals working in communication sciences and disorders to increase their understanding of terms and terminology, and to improve the use of terms across professional, workplace, cross-discipline and public arenas. The *Framework* presented in this symposium represents a first step of many to develop consensus and application of the principles therein. It is both inappropriate and undesirable to present a finished concept; it is most important to engage widely within the professional field for further development.

Developing the *Framework* further will be a process of debate and development, then reconsidering the current organisation and structure of the content in light of this work – a reiterative process rather than a linear process. As we explore the details, it may be necessary to revisit and revise earlier work. This symposium will provide an opportunity for discussion and for other associations to consider involvement in the next stage of international collaboration on the project. A proposal for an international project agreement for 2008-2010 will be considered.

While much progress has been made on developing the *Framework* in the last 3 years, there is considerable work yet to be done. This can be considered in two parts:

- 1) A research agenda for the terminology framework
- 2) A mechanism for coordination of research and development projects

Potential research areas

Rockey (*British Journal of Disorders of Communication*, 1969, 4, pp166-175) said that experts in a specific clinical area may not necessarily also be expert in matters of terminology, although a person who knows the subject thoroughly is likely to define terms within it well. What Rockey was alluding to is the need for more understanding about terminology itself. She called for terminology to be considered a specialised field of study requiring as much research and thought as other specialties.

Description of health concepts is difficult and revisiting and analysing terminology in a productive way is extremely complex. The lack of resolution to our terminology 'problem' despite extensive effort is testament to the fact the greater understanding and resources are necessary to see improvement.

The first and most challenging area for further work is for further research to arrive at a consensus on a conceptual model for communication. Since it is evident that such a model is required before consistency can be addressed, this premise and the model itself warrant considerable attention.

Secondly, we need to increase our understanding of terminology 'traps' and how we fall into them. We need to increase our skills in detecting circular reasoning, and how we may misuse terms. Research into these areas would involve the critical analysis of the use of terms in application.

Thirdly, the various functions for which we use terms in an enormous area of research, touching as it does on the philosophy of our field – what is that we believe we are measuring, treating, and remediating through our practice? Given the way that our use of terminology is derived from medicine, psychology and linguistics, these methodologies require close scrutiny in terms of their application to the field of communication sciences and disorders.

Fourthly, each of the specific criteria for dimensions of communication, context and users, and for definitions themselves requires testing first amongst informed professional and then in the real world. This is an enormous amount of work to be done in this regard, within an array of research methodologies.

Finally, an interesting research area would be on the values and beliefs that professions hold about consistency in terminology. Better understanding of natural human responses to terms could assist attempts to improve how terms are used in our profession. Such research would assist us to promote the importance of consistency amongst the field and learn about way to address issues in terminology.

A mechanism for coordination of research and development projects

Essentially the *Terminology Frameworks Project* is a change project. Therefore a model for sustainable change management has been adopted as a project development model. The model for sustainable change (KPMG Consulting, Australia, 2001) includes:

- A compelling case
- Vision
- Strategy
- Resources
- Capability

- Motivation
- Feedback

The lack of any one of these components can lead to inertia, confusion or frustration. The *Framework for Terminology Use* represents a strategy and some resources to begin this change process, but is obviously only part of the bigger picture.

A *compelling case* for change and a *vision* of the future must be shared broadly across the field of communication sciences and disorders. The impact of inconsistent terminology needs to be discussed more broadly, and the way that inadequate terminology impedes the development of the field must be explored and explained to ensure the case for change is made clearly. This information is available, although not widely shared to date. A shared vision must be ambitious; it is not sufficient to have a vision of a mandated and inflexible list of terms for the field. The widespread perception that a suitable list of terms will resolve our terminology issues needs to be challenged by a more appropriate vision. This is a vision of a dynamic professional group able to actively engage to resolve its terminology issues as they arise, to be logical and consistent in adapting terms as new scientific information is discovered, and to present itself to the public and the government with clear consistent messages that promote the importance of communicative well-being for all people.

The *strategy* for change includes the *Framework* but must also include practical implementation processes. After a period of research, and further consideration and refinement of the *Framework* the profession could encourage its professional literature to insist on consistent terminology based on the concepts of the *Framework*. Local guided work on terminology needs to happen, as revisiting the way one uses terminology is a challenging personal journey. The educators of future professionals need to take a lead role in terms of supporting professionals to develop a more consistent use of terms.

The question of how to find *resources*, *capability*, and sustained *motivation* is a significant challenge for our small professional area. To date financial backing for developmental work in this new approach has been provided by Speech Pathology Australia. Combining resources and capacity internationally will be necessary. Political will, financial priorities and sustained commitment by our professional associations will be necessary.

Finally, future development of the work presented must involve the wider professional membership; there is an inescapable need for broadly-based *feedback* from across the field of communication sciences and disorders. This symposium will be an opportunity to provide initial feedback and to discuss possible strategies to garner feedback from a wider number of associations and leaders in the field.

A major objective for future terminology projects would be to increase the value of consistency in terminology by professionals themselves, to increase the understanding of what limitations we place upon ourselves due to our current terminology use, and to highlight the value of changing these behaviours. Existing terminology is not easily 'given up'; people use terms current during their training, based on knowledge and beliefs developed during their training. Work on terminology projects has shown that changes to terms suggested by 'expert dictate' may face resistance based on long-standing and strong traditions, emotions and 'ownership' of specific terms (Kjaer,

Advances in Speech-Language Pathology, 2005, 7 (2), pp98-100). Better understanding of this natural human response could assist attempts to improve how terms are used in our profession. No projects to date have directly promoted the importance of consistency amongst members of the profession, or aimed to increase the understanding of the issues in terminology. There have been no activities recorded that focus on the behaviour of the professionals in their use of terms. Terminology activities that skill and support people in using terms more appropriately are worth investigating to see if this has a more positive impact. People working to improve terminology would do well to recall Thoreau's comment that 'Things don't change, people do'.

Involving the wider profession in decisions about terminology (or at least clearly demonstrating the rationale for decisions) will be an important aspect of improving consistency over time. Involving clients and others outside our profession will also be important for finding appropriate and accessible terminology.

IGOTF-CSD has developed a draft project plan as a first step in discussing and establishing mechanisms for coordinating terminology work of this nature. The *Terminology Frameworks Project Plan 2006* articulates the issues and future steps to be taken to work collaboratively to address our significant terminology issues.

Influencing attitudes and understanding about something as fundamental and closely tied to one's professional identity as terminology is no small task. We believe it can be done, but will require sufficient will, resources, cooperation, and a realistic timeframe. In fact, we believe it must be done, as terminology presents a significant barrier to the profession's advancement in research, clinical effectiveness, public image and political profile.