

# TERMINÀLIA speaks with...

## Jan Hoel, president of the European Association for Terminology and employee at the Language Council of Norway

### Jan Hoel (Oslo, 1951)

He is currently employed as a senior advisor at the Norwegian Language Council of Norway, where he is coordinator of the Council's "terminology service". He is also a full member and secretary of the Council's standing committee on terminology and special language. He is currently President of the European Association for Terminology (EAFT), a member of the Infoterm Executive Board and the Board of the Nordic

terminology association Nordterm. He has just stepped down from the Presidency of the Nordic Association for Lexicography, where he is still a Board member. Master of Arts, with a major in Nordic linguistics and arts and in addition minors in English and Spanish. He has worked abroad as a university lecturer in Great Britain and in Sweden, and as the head of translation in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

### How did you become interested in terminology? What are the terminology topics that interest you?

I think terminology and terminology work is something that to some extent runs in your veins. It is an activity you have a propensity for. In order to be a good terminologist you need to be fond of logics, semantics, words, details, systems, meticulous work – and long working hours!

I was intrigued by the subjects logics and semantics when I first came across them as a young student. Later, as a fresh university lecturer, I was persuaded into doing some freelance translation of technical texts, and only then did I realize the inestimable importance of having ready access to correct and reliable terminology. I think my interest in terminology and terminology work was sparked then. That interest

increased when I some years later got a position in The Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a translator and translation revisor of EU acts.

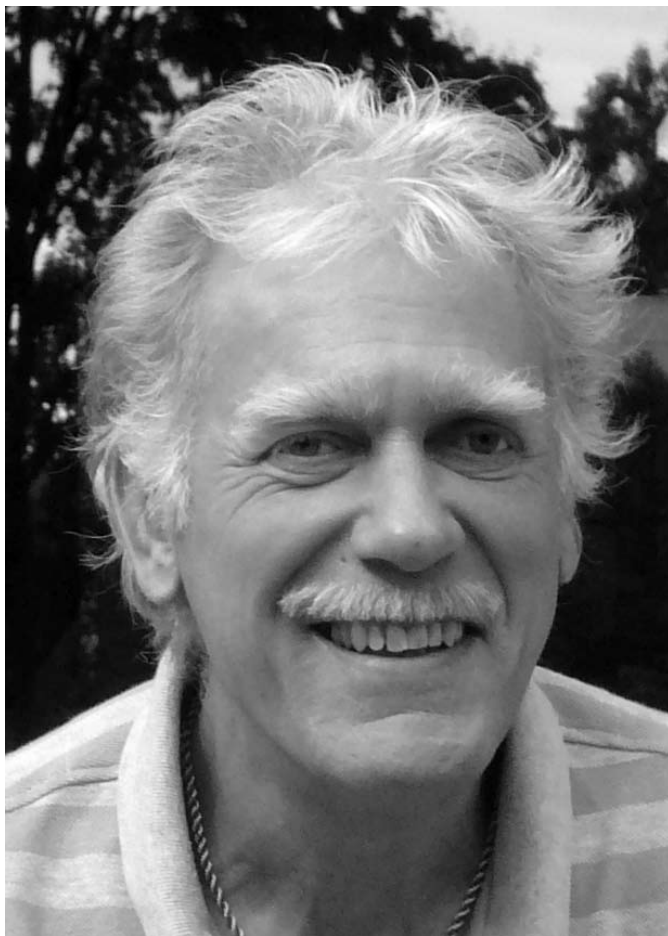
The terminology topics that interest me the most are term choice and term creation in general, but in particular in fields such as modern technologies, jurisprudence and finance.

### What is the role of the Language Council of Norway? Does it have authority in terminology issues? What kind?

The Language Council of Norway is a governmental body. It is the consultative body of the Norwegian government on language issues and has as its overall goal that the two written Norwegian language variants (Bokmål and Nynorsk) will be used everywhere in society today and in the future. The work of the Council

comprises many important sectors and arenas of language usage in society, of which terminology is one.

The Council has a "Terminology service" which I coordinate. It is meant to be a national "hub" in terminology matters. The service has three staff members. We have no explicit authority in terminology issues. Anyway, terminological decisions cannot be imposed on the specialist environments or the public. Successful terminology has to originate in the specialist environment in question, hopefully in fruit- and peaceful cooperation with terminologists and linguists. Our role, therefore, is rather to instigate, arrange for and coordinate terminological activities on the national level. We also try to build alliances which may augment the interest and responsibility for terminology and special language. We also help in establishing termino-



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**Scandinavian and European countries in general: The last decade or so technology industries have constantly innovated terminology and products and often do so in English only. How do the respective national languages receive this new terminology in English?**

Increased internationalization in industry and higher education has many positive aspects, but it also entails serious challenges to national languages. Although both Norwegian and English are Germanic languages according to a historic-linguistic typology, they are very different in terms of spelling and grammatical morphology today.

logy projects and in developing term bases in various environments. Furthermore, we assist specialist environments and give advice to and answer questions from the public at large.

**Are there any other agencies in Norway dealing with terminology? Which ones? How do they coordinate with each other?**

There are no terminology agencies in Norway, in contrast to for instance Sweden and Finland in our vicinity. There was such an agency until 2001, but it closed down then. Terminology is, however, being collected, developed and registered, to a varying degree and intensity, in numerous private and public institutions as part of their business, often as a part or results of translation activities. Besides, in a couple of institutions of higher education courses in terminology are given and there is some research on and research publication in the field.

**Which languages are normally used for working with terminological resources in Norway?**

It is perilous to claim that something is normal without having examined the situation thoroughly beforehand. I will, however, venture to say that English is the most frequent foreign language in national terminological resources. Sometimes French or German may be represented, too. Often the other Scandinavian languages (Danish and Swedish) are represented, and on many occasions other Nordic languages like Icelandic and Finnish. In some cases the various languages of the indigenous Sami population are represented. As a rule Norwegian language is represented by one or both of the two written variants Bokmål and Nynorsk, the former most often since it is the most widely used of the two.

**There has been a new development in terminology in Norway as in other**

With regard to the two Norwegian language variants, several strategies have been applied to counteract English language influence. One strategy is to attempt to develop national equivalent terms as quickly as possible. But it cannot be denied that these attempts often come about too late, so that the English terms already have had time to gain foothold in the language. Another strategy is to “norwegianize” the English loans in terms of spelling and inflection. But this method is disputed because many language users are linguistically conservative and are opposed to transforming English word material according to Norwegian rules in this way.

So, on the whole, the situation today is that many English terms get Norwegian equivalents more or less immediately, either in the media or in the relevant industries themselves. But some new English loan terms – in particular from the Internet, the computer industry

and finance – often survive in Norwegian for some time, until they are replaced by new Norwegian terms coined for the occasion or by Norwegianized forms.

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**You are currently the Norwegian Council's representative in the Nordterm network. What is Nordterm's mission? How is it organised? How is work done in this network?**

Nordterm is not an organization itself; it is an association of organizations and societies in the Nordic countries which are engaged in terminology work, training and research. Its mission is to be a Nordic forum and network for terminologists and terminology work. The Nordic countries are rather similar in many respects, and there is long-standing tradition for cooperation across (almost non-existing) borders. You will find similar cooperation fora in almost every academic subject and walks of life. The Nordic countries are relatively small in terms of inhabitants, but together they are on a level with bigger countries.

There is not much work being done within Nordterm. There have been a few joint projects over the past years, the most recent of them being a multilingual Nordic version of "the terminology of terminology" as it is presented in the ISO standard 1087-2:2000. The association has a Board and currently three standing working groups. The Board meets once a year, every two years concurring with the biennial

Nordterm symposium, which was last held in Stockholm mid-June this year. The activity of the working groups vary a lot, from a meeting every two years to more frequent meetings or contact in order to fulfil a concrete assignment. The main event in Nordterm's life is the biennial symposium, which is a valuable source of contact and exchange of views and experience. It also tends to foster life-long friendships.

**Nordterm is an example of cooperation in terminology between countries with different languages. What kind of cooperation is there in this network? Do you think the Nordterm model is exportable to other parts of Europe? How could terminology cooperation in Europe be improved or enhanced?**

The Nordterm cooperation, like all Nordic cooperation activities, is based on the mutual intelligibility between the three Scandinavian languages Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Many Finns and most Icelanders understand and master Scandinavian. So, basically, Nordterm and other forms of Nordic cooperation are to great extent based on linguistic inter-intelligibility and common views and values. This makes it easy for everybody to communicate within the association, and professional and personal ties are more easily established than the case would have been – I am sure – if a foreign language would have had to be used as a means of communication or lingua franca.

It is difficult for me to say whether the Nordterm model is exportable to other parts of the world. As stated above, a certain similarity in the outlook on the world and in values is at the centre of the cooperation, in addition to the linguistic inter-intelligibility. I suppose the same type of nearness may exist between members of the Union Latine and the Red Panlatina de Terminologia (Realiterm), but I suppose a lingua franca may still be necessary in those contexts. To conclude, I think

there is no use trying to emulate the Nordterm way of cooperation. It is probably singular in its kind. But other environments ought to take some inspiration from the fact that it works and try to make their own cooperation work based on a shared set of interests, values and attitudes.

It is also quite a mouthful to enter on an opinion as to how terminology cooperation could be improved or enhanced in Europe. There are several European and international associations trying to achieve just that. And of course in European institutions like the EU far-reaching cooperation on terminology is already taking place in various bodies and contexts. There are, to my mind, two basic conditions that must be fulfilled in order for more cooperation to come about: There must be a common and sincere wish to cooperate and exchange work, views and experience, and there must be money available to pay what the cooperation costs. And of course, the most widespread shortage for modern human beings and employees must be removed: lack of time!

**Nordterm's mission is to be a Nordic forum and network for terminologists and terminology work**

**As president of the European Association for Terminology (EAFT), can you tell us about your aims for your term? What would you like to achieve during this period? What is the EAFT's current situation? How many members does it have? Are all its members from the EU or are there some from outside it?**

It would not be true to claim that I have extraordinary aims for my term as president of EAFT, which will

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end next autumn. My modest aim is to do as good a job as possible for the association, so that I can step down from the presidency knowing it is in a healthy condition, both professionally and economically. To the extent that I have any goals in particular in addition to that, it is to contribute to making the association more active and to encourage cooperation between it and other associations or institutions. In the first respect, I can in all modesty say that I have this year contributed to encourage two events this coming autumn, one in Croatia in late September and another in Athens in early November. The only concrete wish I have regarding the association is that its Brussels declaration is amended to include something more on the importance of national LSP and terminology in higher education. English language is taking foothold in this sector in most European countries, banishing the national languages, and this development is quite disturbing.

The current situation of EAFT is stable. Work is being done in an exemplary fashion in its secretariat at Termcat in Barcelona, where updating of the web pages and monthly publishing of the EAFT newsletter are two of its important tasks. The association has currently about 90 members, institutional and individual. The number could have been higher, but if one looks at the institutional members represented, it is evident that many large and influential terminology producers and users are represented. Most members are geographically located in an ever-expanding European Union, but there are also members from outside the union, like for instance my institution! And I suppose “European” is still to be taken to mean ‘concerning or belonging to (the continent) Europe’.

**Around 2000 an internal debate began in the EAFT about what kind of model it should have: whether to be an association of people and**

**institutions from European countries, or alternatively an association of national associations. Is this debate still ongoing?**

I must admit that I have never been informed of that debate. If I was to have a say in the matter, I would recommend that things stayed the way they are at the moment, where both institutional and individual members are welcome.

**What is your view of scientific journals in the field of terminology? Do you think a journal like TERMINÀLIA, in Catalan but also featuring articles in English, French and Spanish; can find a place in European terminology?**

I absolutely think scientific journals on terminology are necessary and useful both to inform on ongoing terminology work and projects and to promote research in terminology, thereby enhancing the status of this discipline amongst the informed and interested public. It would certainly be counterproductive to publish a national terminology journal in English only outside the United Kingdom, since all languages must have access to necessary current ter-

minology and make it known and viable through actual usage. Besides, there already exists an international terminology journal by the name *Terminology* published in English. But I think it is justified to provide a blend of articles in the vernacular and in a more widely understood language like French or English. Personally I edited and published the first issue of our new journal *Terminologen* (“The Terminologist”) last year, but we will primarily restrict ourselves to publishing articles in Norwegian or other Scandinavian languages, which means it may be useful to readers in all the Nordic countries.

**Is there anything you would like to mention which we have not asked you about?**

I cannot think of anything else to say than thank you for giving me this opportunity to be “heard”. It is a pity I am not able to give the answers in Catalan, but an ordinary person’s life is too short to learn to understand more than three–four foreign languages, and unfortunately Catalan never did become one of mine.

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