

Lenguas, lenguaje y lingüística

Contribuciones desde la Lingüística General

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(Eds.)

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Lenguas, lenguaje y lingüística.

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TECHNICAL TRANSLATION, TERMINOLOGY AND THE ACCESSIBILITY OF SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE IN PORTUGUESE¹

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1. TERMINOLOGY AND SOCIETY

As of today, we may sketchily describe terminology as a vocabulary of words, terms and expressions that are used in a specific industry, organization or scientific area. Terminology can be ‘interlinguistic’ (i.e. bilingual or multilingual) or ‘intralinguistic’ (as the name shows, within the same language) (Cavaco-Cruz 2012: 40).

In short, the terminological principles and methods can serve as a basis for different types of activities, from classification to teaching and to indexing, as well as the display of different points of view relating to contents of various concepts and their interrelationships in any subject area (Cavaco-Cruz 2012: 40).

Modern age, through its immense expertise, on the one hand, and through its growing interdisciplinary aspects, on the other, has generated growing problems in mass communication, however, bestowing special relevance in terminology so this science may attempt to solve them (Cavaco-Cruz 2012: 40).

As Cardoso (2005: 32) says, “only if we look at society in an integrated manner – taking into account the infrastructure, production and knowledge– can we identify the transition processes in progress in contemporary societies”. A diachronic and synchronic analysis of the Portuguese society is thus fundamental to understand its idiosyncrasies, linguistically and cognitively wise. Such thorough analysis is required to be done, and should be endeavored soon by researchers.

The common reader is shifting from a passive consumer to an active user: we entered the age of the Society of Information. With the advent of this new age, it is also shifting the way people communicate textually –as it is changing the amount, quality and diversity of content thus provided to them–.

Indeed, new Information Technologies have radically changed the way people live their lives: the way they work, interact, communicate, shop, study, and all possible variables pertaining to the human daily life.

A good example of this shift is shown in the table below, which is based upon differences between digital and old media marketing, after Chaffey et al. (2006: 26):

¹ The results of this paper were previously presented at the *11th International Conference on General Linguistics*, Universidad de Navarra (Pamplona, Spain, on May 23, 2014).

<i>Old media</i>	<i>Digital media</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>One-to-many communication model</i>	<i>One-to-one or many-to-many communication model</i>	<i>Hoffman and Novak (1996) state that theoretically the Internet is a many-to-many medium, but for company-to-customer organization(s) communications it is best considered as one-to-one or one-to-many</i>
<i>Mass-marketing push model</i>	<i>Individualized marketing or mass customization Pull model for web marketing</i>	<i>Personalization possible because of technology to monitor preferences and tailor content (Deighton 1996)</i>
<i>Monologue</i>	<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>Indicates the interactive nature of the World Wide Web, with the facility for feedback</i>
<i>Branding</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Increased involvement of customer in defining brand characteristics. Opportunities for adding value to brand</i>
<i>Supply-side thinking</i>	<i>Demand-side thinking</i>	<i>Customer pull becomes more important</i>
<i>Customer as a target</i>	<i>Customer as a partner</i>	<i>Customer has more input into products and services required</i>
<i>Segmentation</i>	<i>Communities</i>	<i>Aggregations of like-minded consumers rather than arbitrarily defined target segments</i>

Similarly, the American Government emphasizes the importance of communicating with its citizens through the Internet. In 2010, the PEW's Government Online report, led by Research Specialist Aaron Smith (Smith 2010), of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, found that a "fully 82% of [American] internet users (representing 61% of all American adults) looked for information or completed a transaction² on a government website in the twelve months preceding this survey" (the survey's results were brought up on April 27, 2010).

Because of such communicative developments, linguistic accessibility is at the core of contemporary governmental, institutional and corporate concerns. Easy and clear communication and prompt interaction depend on it, as much as cost control, content deliverance and liability disputes cutback. One may ask: How accessible, structured and pertinent are the linguistic tools made available to linguists? How adapted to this new reality is terminological science?

Terminological research proposes to identify the words that communicate specialized knowledge –although this 'specialization' has already spilt to people's daily lives–. The main function of this specialized knowledge consists of effectively delivering them and authenticating them via terminological usage.

Classification systems have evolved and reflect today the progress we have attained in each specialization field. This development can provide the advent of new subject matters, the migration of concepts between specialized fields, or even the disappearance, merging or differentiation of certain concepts and/or designations.

² As far as the term 'transaction', we should consider its meaning as any "communication involving two or more people that affects all those involved" (American Heritage Dictionary 2009).

2. ON PORTUGUESE NEOLOGY

In what relates to Portuguese language –and somehow, transversally to other languages– this evolution presents us with a challenge: under the light of later years' Cognitive Linguistics research, mainly by the hand of Langacker (2013), Kövecses (2006), and Taylor (2010), we should question traditional neology and neonymy and their terminological methodology.

In Portugal, scholars as Correia have developed meritorious work. In Correia's words (1998: 67-68), a terminological neologism should:

- Denominate a stable concept, previously delimited in an explicit and clear way, with which must maintain an univocal relationship;
- Be brief and concise;
- Be built according to the rules of the linguistic system itself;
- Be transparent;
- Be able to constitute the basis of derived words series;
- Be adapted to the spelling and the language phonological system [...].³

These neonymic constraints, which underlie the establishment of a terminological neologism, imply, according to Correia, sociolinguistic conditions, so that a terminological neologism

- Should be the product of an effective denominational need;
- Should not present negative connotations or cause inconvenient associations;
- Must belong to a formal register of expertise;
- Must be able to be memorized with ease (which results necessarily in its compliance to the linguistic system where it is produced);
- Should not contradict the basic lines of linguistic policy previously established.⁴

Finally, according to the author, the neological activity must comply with the following conditions:

- Must include the collaboration of specialists who drive neological proposals;
- Should not contradict the rules existing in other terms from the same domain;
- Must assume that an unacceptable form, even if widely consolidated by use, may be abolished;
- Should not proceed with the normalization of a term without taking into account the conceptual and denominational systems which is a part of.
- [E]qually relevant or more important even than creating a term, on the one hand, is to normalizing the terms, i.e. instituting them legally as the terms to be used in the context of scientific and technical institutional communication, and disseminating these standards along its direct users.⁵

Notwithstanding, we believe some of these neonymic procedures raise some problems at various levels:

³ Author's translation (A. T.).

⁴ A. T.

⁵ A. T.

- Denominate a stable concept, previously delimited in an explicit and clear way, with which must maintain an univocal relationship;
- Should not contradict the rules existing in other terms from the same domain;
- Must assume that an unacceptable form, even if widely consolidated by use, may be abolished;
- [E]qually relevant or more important even than creating a term, on the one hand, is to normalizing the terms, i.e. instituting them legally as the terms to be used in the context of scientific and technical institutional communication, and disseminating these standards along its direct users.

The common denominator to all of these principles appears to be one: the possibility of language specialists being in control of terminological creativity. If this intent can be altruistic to ensure the quality and the linguistic ‘purity’ of terminological material, quickly collides with not only the high pace at which new concepts, products and services are being created today –because of the pressing need for neological denomination– but it also collides with today’s terminological authorship.

Without losing sight of what we previously defined, a term denominates concepts and it is governed by linguistic rules. Different or not from lexicographic rules, terminological rules are based on operational needs of denominating something, which underlie, linguistically, the basic principles of linguistic creativity. In this respect, Duarte (2001: 114) states that

productivity of unlimited nature is a central feature of linguistic creativity. It is extended to all areas of grammar and underpins the possibility, shared by all languages, of naming new objects and new concepts and of describing real or imaginary situations never before lived or imagined.⁶

Simultaneously, one must take into consideration

[...] the capacity that speakers have to produce and understand sentences with made-up words, since these are integrated into flexional and derivational models and word order patterns characteristic of the language (Duarte 2001: 115).

Hence, the idea of conceptual stability –previously delimited in an explicit and clear manner, and brought forward by Correia and others– is a proposal that immediately collides with the swiftness of technological innovation, whose terminology requires constant and uninterrupted update.

In what way may we consider “stable” and “delimited” a device denomination that has just been created to fill a computing need? How to control the pressing denominational need of products that have just been patented and that, regardless of whether they can be of substantial technological relevance, are not yet in production?

Moreover, this set of neonymic rules does not account for other variables that play (or should play) a major role in contemporary terminology:

- It does not account for linguistic accessibility constraints, driven by each target-group;
- It does not account for cognitive variables in the neonymic process;

⁶ A. T.

- It does not account for technical and scientific terminological parameters that will provide linguists (both writers and translators) with the proper procedural knowledge conducting to an autonomic neonymic strategy;
- And it does not account, as we well know today, how people utilize both “common language” and “specialty language” on a daily basis when using objects, utensils, tools, or vehicles. And they utilize them in a common and carefree manner, since the lexicon of everyday life is saturated in technical terminology –what Cabré, citing Galisson, calls “banalization” (1999: 63)–. In today's technological world, one can no longer disentangle one from the other, not without some effort.

The problem thickens when we know that there are societies, such as Portuguese-speaking countries, where literacy levels are very low, thus requiring us to approach this issue with an attitude that must be simultaneously utilitarian and concerned about accessibility. Moreover, we must do this concerning the use of terminological and neological techniques and strategies.

3. ON THE LITERACY OF PORTUGAL AND BRAZIL

Indeed, in spite of the innumerable advances in alphabetization growth during the last ten to twenty years, Portuguese-speaking countries experience a serious dichotomy between a rich literary production, on one hand, and a paradoxical endogenous low-literacy, on the other. If we look at some available data on Portugal and Brazil, one can see that there is still a long way to go.

**Population residing in Portugal, 15 Years-old and over,
Highest school level attained, 2013 (%)**

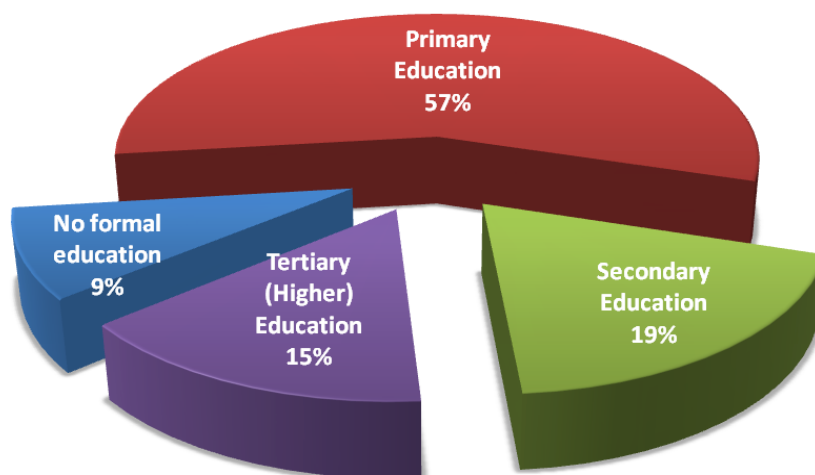


Chart 1. Population residing in Portugal, 15 years-old and over, Highest School Level attained, 2013 (%).

Data Source: INE; PORDATA. Last Update: May 15, 2014. Chart Source: Luis Cavaco-Cruz.

Tabela III				
Escolaridade da população de 15 a 64 anos no Brasil / IBGE				
Escolaridade	Censo 2000		PNAD 2009	
Sem escolaridade	10%	10.866.552	9%	11.766.782
Ensino Fundamental I	30%	32.599.656	18%	23.533.564
Ensino Fundamental II	28%	30.426.345	24%	31.378.086
Ensino Médio	24%	26.079.725	35%	45.759.708
Superior	8%	8.693.242	14%	18.303.883
TOTAL	100%	108.665.519	100%	130.742.024

Fonte: IBGE: Censo Populacional 2000 e PNAD 2009 2010

Chart 2. Population residing in Brazil, 15 to 64 years-old, Highest School Level attained, 2009. Data & Table Source: IBGE.

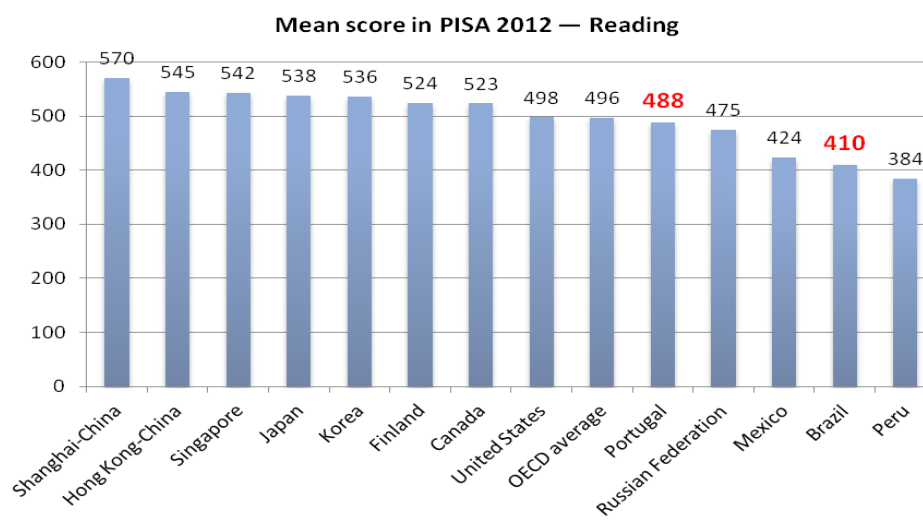


Chart 3. PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I)-OECD, 2013. Chart Source: Luis Cavaco-Cruz.

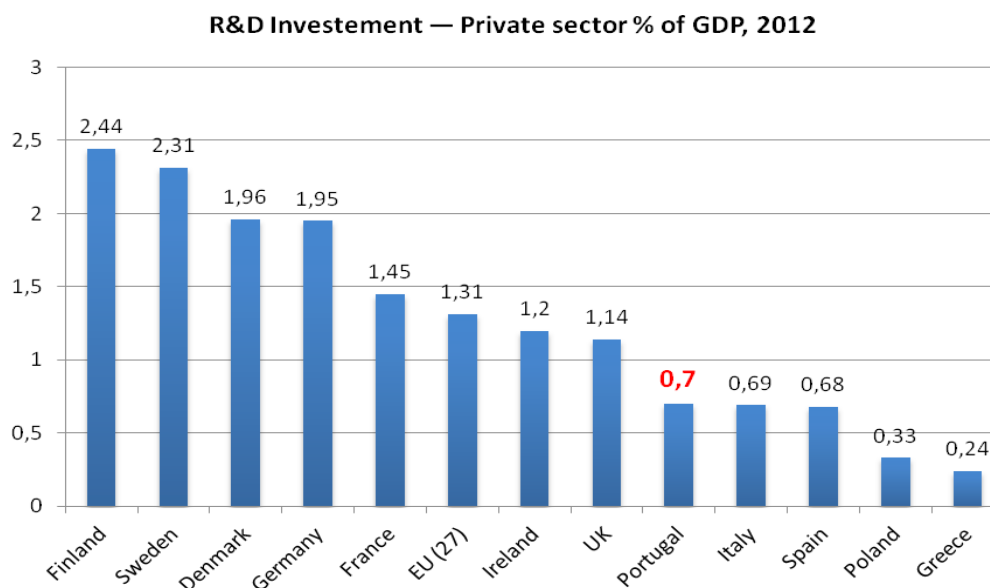


Chart 4. Eurostat/OECD/PORDATA, 2013. Chart Source: Luis Cavaco-Cruz.

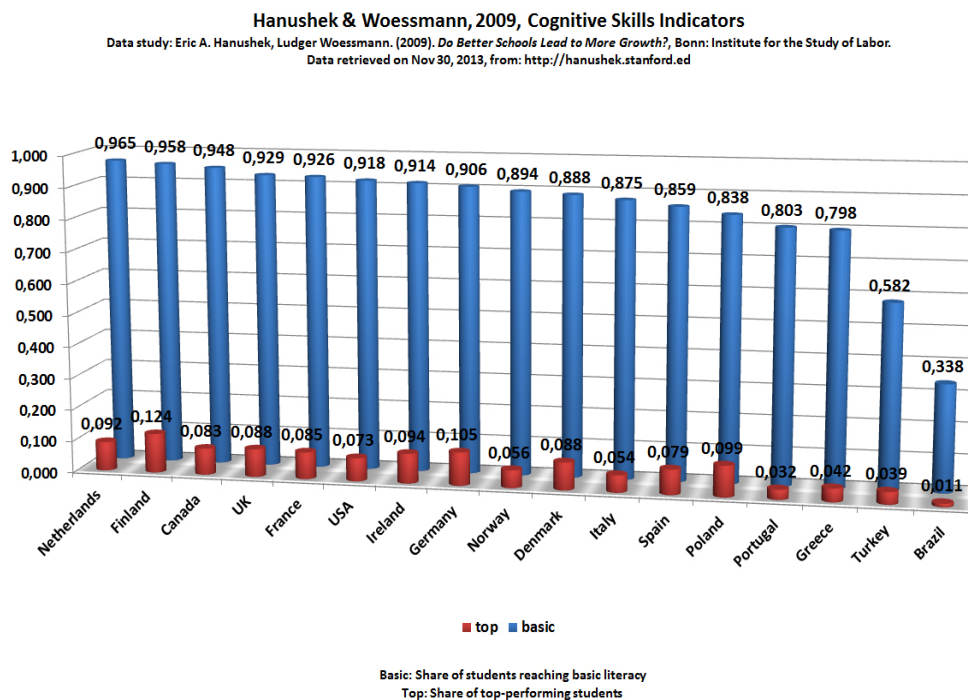


Chart 5. Data: Hanushek & Woessmann, 2009. Chart Source: Luis Cavaco-Cruz.

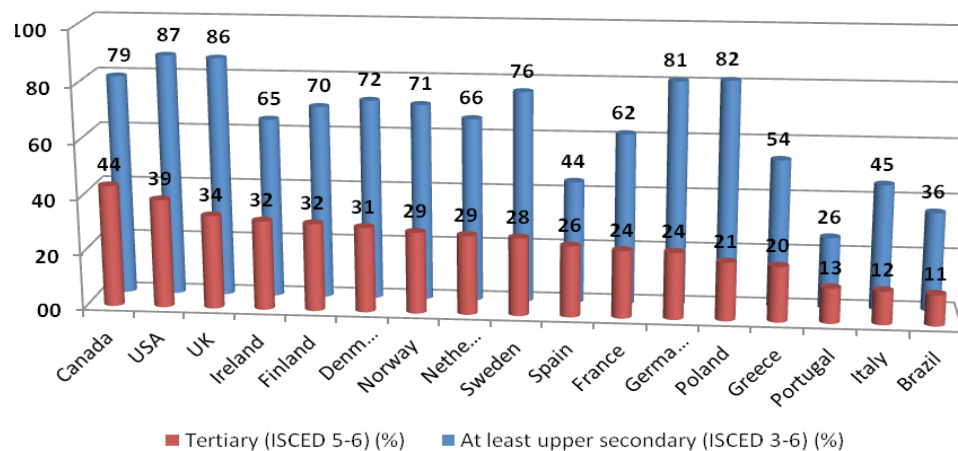


Chart 6. Cumulative educational attainment of the population aged 25 years and older (%). Latest year available: 2010 (except: Poland, Denmark: 2011; Canada: 2006; Finland: 2009). Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013. Chart Source: Luis Cavaco-Cruz.

We can venture some conclusions by looking at the above charts. Firstly, Portugal and Brazil show high rates of population with low-levels of alphabetization; both countries present a large share of the population with no formal education (9%). We may add to this very low attainment in secondary and tertiary education, comparing to other OECD countries. This low attainment is in line with lower Cognitive Skills Indicators brought forward by Hanushek & Woessmann (2009), and partially corroborated by OECD’s PISA

2012 testing, where both Portugal and Brazil are still below OECD's 500 point threshold (Portugal, 488 and Brazil, 410).

Another relevant indicator is the low Portuguese corporate investment in R&D (0,7% of GDP), which is almost half of the EU (27) average (1,31% of GDP), and less than one third (28,68%) of Finnish investment (2,44% of GDP). This may indicate various causes: for one, the fact that education and specialized training is still undervalued at Portuguese corporate level; and secondly, that many a Portuguese businesses are not yet dependent upon high-skilled labor.

CONCLUSION

All of these facts concur to the conclusion that the implementation of terminological neology and other linguistic measures has to take in consideration such limitations and constraints, and make place for the implementation of linguistic accessibility measures and accessible terminological ruling. Professionals such as Technical Writers and Technical Translators need to have at hand an array of tools that will allow them to clearly convey neonyms and retrieved terminology accessible to everyone –or, at least, to a large majority of the population that may not grasp high-level communication, i.e., communication that is not adapted to their linguistic and cognitive constraints–. At this stage, we can clearly see that linguistic accessibility is another variable at the core of terminological creativity.

In this context, there are clear situations in which specialized language aimed at the general public does not sit well with the existing literacy levels, not only in Portuguese language, but also in general. The definition of terminology, in the *Computer Desktop Encyclopedia* (Freedman & Morrison 2012), shows exactly that:

The terminology used in the computer and telecommunications field adds tremendous confusion not only for the lay person, but for the technicians themselves.

What many do not realize is that terms are made up by anybody and everybody in a nonchalant, casual manner without any regard or understanding of their ultimate ramifications. Programmers come up with error messages that make sense to them at the moment and never give a thought that people actually have to read them when something goes wrong. In addition, marketing people turn everything upside down, naming things based on how high-tech and sexy they sound. And, the worst of all is naming specific technologies with generic words.

How do we solve such chaotic state of terminological affairs, while focusing on today's Portuguese-speaking society?

In truth, this widespread randomization of neological and neonymic disorder poses serious problems to the understanding of daily life concepts and the compliance of the general public with needed instructions, information and procedures. Furthermore, it creates confusion among translators, and adds difficulties between and within corporations which are trying to cope with such an array of delusional linguistic terminological conditions. The inexistence of diversified training materials in Portuguese also contributes to this existing state of affairs by preventing many monolingual speakers –many of them involved in the process of term making– from accessing quality reference sources in order to perform their job in a suitable fashion.

Authors such as Cabré (1999: 199) question if terminological standardization should or should not be implemented and argues that the “purpose of terminological standardization is to aid communication in special languages, and is not applied to the vocabulary of the general language” (1999: 200). As we have argued, this distinction does not or should not apply anymore, not in a world so embedded with technology and technological terminology. Where do we set the boundary?

Should we consider being a specialized language Kocourek’s dichotomic notion of semiotic/natural language, as Cabré introduced it? We agree with Cabré when she states that “there is still no single and clear definition of the concept ‘special language’” (1999: 61); in fact, most definitions are either too vague or fall short from defining it with precision. Somehow, we can only attempt to define specialty languages synchronically in a much-delimited moment in time. However, as soon as we would publish such an essay, it would be outdate because of technological fast pace and the world revolving around it. For instance, when computing technology was just starting, a ‘hard drive’ or a ‘server’ were but cryptic language to any common folk; yet, soon after, these terms were imbedded in people’s daily vocabulary.

The problem worsens when the creation of such vocabularies does not encompass pre-existing terms, nor it concerns with people’s limited technological and reading literacies, as it happens in Portugal and Brazil. That is, many translators disregard –or simply are unaware of– existing terminology for a specialized language, or they simply get confused with the profusion of existing homonymy related to any given term. This confusion is sometimes visibly present in many dictionaries pertaining to a same specialized subject matter, yet holding significant divergences between them.

In addition, the legal looseness or utter absence thereof concerning translator certification, in Portuguese-speaking countries, contributes to this state of affairs. Many translators are accidental practitioners, lack linguistic training, or simply have no formal education on the subject. Adding to this, many terms are created at production level by linguistically unprepared engineers, programmers and technical personnel, despite their academic level. Under these circumstances, standardization bureaus, at any level, can do no remedial terminological work. Such corrective labor has to be proactively done upstream, not reactively done downstream.

To sum up, a possible outcome in trying to prevent such linguistic disorder from happening in Portuguese language is five-fold, and should be achieved by:

1. Standardizing neonymic processes in such a widespread manner that may be available to term creators and translators in specialized technical and scientific fields; such neonymic processes should encompass:
 - a. Reviewed terminological theories driven by contemporary sociolinguistic constraints;
 - b. Language policy previously established in each country;
 - c. Terminological constraints processes delimited by specialized languages;
 - d. Linguistic accessibility constraints, driven by each target-group; and
 - e. Cognitive-linguistic variables, such as conceptual domains.

2. Creating terminological rules that should be broad enough to reach out to the existing varieties of Portuguese, in a spirit of rigor and respect for linguistic diversity and accessibility, in all of the covered countries and territories;
3. Implementing proper legislation, regulating not only training requirements, but also establishing practical and widespread good practices of terminological creativity;
4. Implementing proper research that may facilitate researchers, lexicographers and terminologists with the right training and tools that will contribute to a more coherent publishing of study materials, corpora research, and dictionary making;
5. Enhancing terminological studies throughout, and granting them the appropriate relevance and autonomy they require in order to establishing quality training programs.

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