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Almsten

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INTERVIEW: Knowledge and Terminology Management at Crisplant

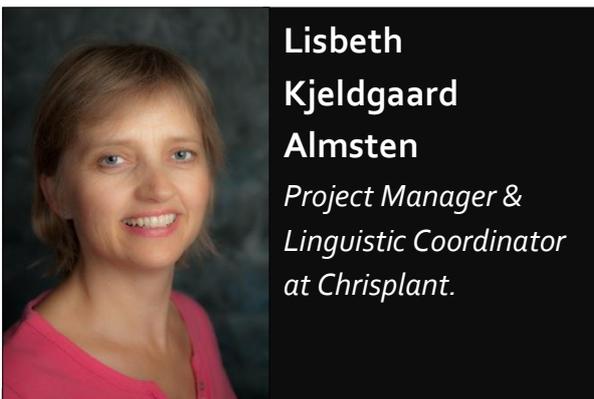
Margrethe H. Møller interviews Lisbeth Kjeldgaard Almsten

"If you think that terminology work is simply a matter of buying terminology management software and getting started, you are in for trouble"

Abstract

At Crisplant, we have been doing terminology management for the past 20 years. Today, term bases are used not just for terminology-oriented term management. Recording other types of master data needed by all kinds of professionals in the enterprise is equally important. Within the past year, Crisplant has been acquired by the German BEUMER group, which means that the terminological resources of the two enterprises are in the process of being integrated. The challenges presented by this process demonstrate the importance of adhering to terminological principles when recording terminology resources, while at the same time reminding us what an essential discipline terminology management really is, in enterprise practice as well as in education.

MØLLER: How is knowledge and terminology management carried out at Crisplant?



**Lisbeth
Kjeldgaard
Almsten**
*Project Manager &
Linguistic Coordinator
at Crisplant.*

Lisbeth Kjeldgaard Almsten is dedicated to language technology, and she plays the role of coordinator vis-à-vis her colleagues in the BEUMER Group, who use the same language technology tools as the ones she works with.

ALMSTEN: Knowledge and terminology management was introduced at Crisplant in the early 1990s when we participated in the Danterm Project. In the Danterm project, enterprises and research institutions cooperated in developing methods and tools for establishing and running enterprise term bases. At that point in time, we simply recorded terms for translation purposes. The terms we recorded were core terms referring to the primary functions and components of our products.

Today, terminology is still being recorded and managed for translation

purposes, but knowledge management in the form of master data management has become an equally important purpose of our terminology management efforts. Master data are the terms we need to apply in a consistent way in our internal IT systems as well as in our customer documentation. Examples are the core terms relating to sorting technology such as chute (Da. sliske), induction (Da. indføring), discharge (Da. afkast) - but also terms applied in the GUIs (Graphical User Interfaces) and the service and error messages of the IT systems we install when delivering sorting and control systems to our customers.

These are data that all BEUMER Group employees need to be able to retrieve and reuse. For example, it is essential for our engineers, when designing drawings and models

using CAD software, to apply symbols and texts in a consistent way. In order to achieve this consistency, we record the symbols and texts as master data in the term base.

A third category of master data entered in the term base are item master data designating individual components, i.e. the names of the components entered into our ERP system - whether they are components bought from outside or components manufactured by ourselves.

It goes without saying that master data need to be localized. In other words, they need to be translated and adapted for colleagues in our regional offices as well as for customers abroad, so we also record foreign language equivalents.

Q: How is this work organized?

A: Our engineers and designers are of course the ones who take technical responsibility for our products. Together with our documentation department, they decide on the terminology to be used, and they also write part of the product documentation. Thus the form of the master data is not decided by the linguistically trained staff alone; the engineers who are the future users of the terms have a great say as well, not least when it comes to the English version of the data.

As linguistically trained employees who come from various departments of the enterprise, we validate the terms of our respective languages, and we also perform the actual entering of the data into the term base. One linguistically trained person is responsible for term validation in each of the languages German, Spanish, and French. I

Chrisplant a/s

a member of BEUMER Group

Chrisplant is a developer of sorting technology and control systems for baggage handling, material handling and logistic systems in airports and post offices.

Situated in Aarhus, Denmark, Chrisplant has offices all over the world. In August 2009, Chrisplant became part of the German BEUMER Group.

myself am responsible for term validation in Danish and English. New concepts are entered into the common group term base after consultation with our colleagues at the headquarters in Germany.

Our documentation department functions as Crisplant's standardization department, which means that they have to validate the item master data entered into our EPR system. Such designations are typical examples of terminology functioning as master data, and thus they have to be validated.

Q: Which types of employees are users of the term bank, how do they use the system, and do they provide any kind of feedback?

A: There are three types of term bank users:

- linguists doing translation and thus terminology work
- technical editors and engineers who need to retrieve and re-use master data
- all the employees who produce texts; they have had access to the term base via our intranet for many years

The term base is used actively at Crisplant, and management supports it to a large degree. The BEUMER Group, our new owners, focus a lot on standardization, which means that this theme is given increased attention - and that goes for the terminology as well as for the products.

Q: Which types of tools and methods do you apply?

A: We apply term base software integrated with a TM system. The system runs on a server which can be accessed across the entire group, no matter where an employee is situated geographically. Our external translators have access as well, which enables us to exchange translation jobs.

Q: As you mentioned before, Crisplant was recently acquired by the German BEUMER Group. I guess that, like other enterprises which have experienced mergers, you have also been met by a number of challenges in terms of system integration. Can you tell me about those challenges and about the potentials you view for handling them?

A: Like Crisplant, the BEUMER Group has been engaged in terminology management for many years.

Various challenges arise for terminology management in connection with a merger. A number of minor factors are decisive as to whether the merging of existing term bases will be easy or difficult.

First, you need to decide on a common terminology. Both enterprises work in the same production field, i.e. sorting technology and control systems, and they have done so for many years. This means that we end up with a good deal of terms that are similar. Both enterprises have English as their second language, so we may have selected the same English term for two different components, or we may have selected two different terms to name the same component. This may make it difficult to decide on a common solution, i.e. to decide on our future common terminology.

What has also become very clear to us is that changing terms is an extremely costly process. If we choose to change a core term, we have to change it in all standard documents as well as in all IT systems in order to secure consistency. This requires a huge effort, and you may ask if it is practically possible at all. A lot of Crisplant employees have been with us for many years, which means that our terminology comes as second nature to us. Changing it would almost require brainwashing employees. And of course the same applies to our colleagues at the BEUMER Group, so we have a great challenge here.

Secondly, for the two term bases to be integrated, they need to be based on terminological principles. This means that they must have the concept as their basic unit, not the source language term like in lexicographically organized term bases.

We have found that both the BEUMER term base and our own Crisplant term base have some lexicographic traits. Danish being our mother tongue, it is difficult not to use the term base for recording the equivalent we use when translating from Danish into English as well as into other languages.

The example in figure 1 illustrates this problem: a term used very frequently at Crisplant is the Danish term *afdækning*, referring to a plate used for covering a machine part in one of our sorting and controlling systems. The English equivalent is *cover*, and the German equivalent is *Abdeckung*. However, in the BEUMER term base, *Abdeckung* has several more general English equivalents such as *surface*, *ceiling*, and *cover*. The problem is that the Danish term *afdækning* should never be translated into *surface* or *ceiling* in a Crisplant context.

In this way, terms with different meanings will be recorded under the same concept. If you need to use the term base in 10 to 15 different languages, it is essential for the term base to be based 100% on terminological principles. With a number of different mother tongues being applied across the group, it is impossible to predict which source language you need to search in. This is definitely a

Crisplant's term base:

Afdækning

= cover (EN)

= Abdeckung (GE)

BEUMER's term base:

Abdeckung

= surface (EN)

= ceiling (EN)

Figure 1: The German term "Abdeckung" covers several different concepts in two different term bases

challenge, and being totally consistent is difficult. In many cases you choose equivalents belonging to a different level of abstraction within the same concept, and with a multi-language term base this may cause problems. In one language you may use a very specific term, and when you translate it into English, you may find a term with a slightly more general meaning, so of course it is difficult.

Thirdly, you need to agree on the criteria for deciding what a term candidate is. Many approaches may exist to this question. For example, the Crisplant term base comprises a good deal of general expressions applied over and over - such as in relation to. This means that in some respects, you end up with a kind of translation dictionary, but in a multi-lingual term base this does not make sense.

Q: How do you work on this?

A: We record problems as well as positive points in order to get an overview of where we need to do an effort, and where we may gain from doing an effort. Terminology work may take up all your time, so you need to strike a balance.

Q: We have talked about terminology management in practice - do you think we have missed any points?

A: I have become increasingly aware of the importance of terminology as a discipline. As a translator and a linguistically trained person, if you think that terminology work is simply a matter of buying terminology management software - a database - and getting started, you are in for trouble. If you do not understand a number of basic principles, and if you are not trained in working according to those principles, you may very soon end up with a term base that does not fully match your needs and resources.

It's interesting that almost 20 years after we started up the Danterm project, the principles we applied in those days are still valid, and over time they make more and more sense to us. Not long ago, I spoke with a colleague in IT who also participated in the Danterm project. He is working on our SharePoint portal now, and he told me that the Danterm project gave him invaluable insights into knowledge management, and that on the whole, participating back in those days provided him with basic knowledge about terminology management which is still useful to him.

So to conclude, I am very much in favor of a greater focus on terminology management, both in practice and in the education system.

(Translator/co-author: Birthe Toft, assoc. prof., University of Southern Denmark)