

Eugenio Coseriu: Insights on Terminology

Cristina VARGA

Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Catholic University of l'Ouest, Angers, France

Abstract: Known for his extensive linguistic work and for his complex linguistic theoretical system, Eugenio Coseriu debates on different occasions the problematics of terminology as a secondary topic in different studies. Under the influence of the increasing visibility of terminology as a discipline, Coseriu's ideas on terminology published in the 1970s and 1980s have been used as a theoretical framework in terminology research and are quoted in several terminological studies.

This article aims to explore and systematize all ideas about terminology put forward in Coserian studies, answering the following questions: in which articles does Coseriu state his ideas about terminology? What are the main Coserian views on terminology? Which of Eugenio Coseriu's statements about terminology come close to current theories of terminology?

Our research is intended to provide a comprehensive inventory of Coserian statements about terminology and, in particular, about the place of terminology in the author's linguistic work.

Keywords: terminology, integral linguistics, Eugenio Coseriu, terminology creation, terminology theory.

Introduction

Many studies and scholars mention Eugenio Coseriu as one of the most important linguists of the 20th century, with a vast linguistic oeuvre and important theoretical contributions in various fields of linguistics. He is particularly recognised for his comprehensive linguistic theory, *Integral Linguistics*, for his encyclopaedic knowledge of classical, Romance and Slavic languages, and for his contributions to Romance linguistics studies. This broad theoretical framework also includes smaller studies discussing

topics such as translation theory and terminology, areas that have become highly visible in research in recent decades.

Although terminology is considered a discipline nowadays, it would be wrong to consider that Eugenio Coseriu dealt with terminology in this context, as can be seen from various studies. In the Coserian texts where terminology is referred to, the author is not dealing with a discipline but with terminology in the general sense of the term. Therefore, we can speak neither of a theory of terminology nor of terminology as a discipline in the context of Coserian linguistics. What can be said, however, is that Eugenio Coseriu enunciates ideas and theoretical distinctions about terminologies and nomenclatures that are necessary within the framework of integral linguistics and structural semantics. These ideas, because they are recurrently mentioned and described in depth, can give us an overview of the Coserian perception of terminology.

There are several reasons why we believe that a thorough and structured knowledge of the Coserians' ideas about terminology is necessary. First, the fact that some linguists have misperceived the subject and have come to claim that Eugenio Coseriu excludes terminology from the field of semantics (Niederehe 1974, 84-112) or that terminology is for Coseriu a mere nomenclature that is not part of natural language and is of no interest to linguists (Cabr  2015, 13).

As Coseriu himself states (Coseriu 1987, 175), this is a misunderstanding. Surprisingly, even though it was explained in 1987, the misperception continues to persist, thus Teresa Cabr 's (2015, 13) comments reflect it in an interview.

Another reason why we believe that a systematic presentation of the ideas stated about terminology in integral linguistics is useful is that, in some studies, Eugenio Coseriu's general conception of terminologies and nomenclatures is mentioned as a

theory. As the scholar did not deal with the study of terminology, but only mentions it in order to establish some theoretical distinctions in the context of structural semantics, we think it is erroneous to consider that there is a theory of terminology in Coseriu's research.

The present paper aims to examine the main concepts and ideas of Eugenio Coseriu on terminology discussed by the author in several studies published between 1970- 1980. These studies are completed by a posthumous study, published in 2016. Our main objective is to make an inventory and to systematize Coserian ideas about terminology according to the articles in which they have been published. We also believe that a comprehensive analysis of these studies will allow us to underline the contribution of Eugenio Coseriu to terminology in general.

In order to fulfil the objectives of this research we need to answer the following questions: *In which articles does Coseriu state his ideas about terminology? What are the main Coserian views on terminology? Which of Eugenio Coseriu's statements about terminology come close to current theories of terminology?*

Our research continues a series of previous published papers on Eugenio Coseriu's works on translation and terminology (Varga, 2009, 2019, 2020) and it is intended to provide a comprehensive inventory of Coserian statements about this topic within the author's linguistic work.

The outcome of this endeavour will allow us to understand more accurately Eugenio Coseriu's statements about terminology and the context in which they were debated within the more general framework of his linguistic work. Furthermore, bearing in mind that Eugenio Coseriu clearly does not refer to terminology as a discipline, as it is commonly seen nowadays, we consider that it is important to find out which ideas of the great scholar come close to modern theories of terminology.

Methodology of work

In order to achieve the objectives of the current research, a methodology of work has been developed to allow us to make a complete and systematized inventory of Eugenio Coseriu's ideas on terminology. This methodology involves a complex research process that has been developed in several stages that will be described in detail in this section.

The first stage of the research consists of creating the corpus as a source of quantitative and qualitative data allowing the analysis of terminology mentions in the Coserian texts. In spite of its small size, the corpus is not easy to build, as the texts in which Eugenio Coseriu discusses terminology are difficult to find. In order to ensure the accuracy of data used in our research, a detailed description of the corpus and of its qualitative and quantitative data has been provided in the following section.

The texts within the corpus have been arranged in the chronological order of their publication. Then, these texts were read and analysed, which allowed us to extract the statements related to terminologies, nomenclatures and terms.

The ideas extracted from each text have been structured in the form of a list and have been noted according to their appearance in the texts. The recurrent statements were also repeated in the list we created. This allows us to observe which statements are more frequently mentioned in Coserian texts. Also, the ideas extracted are not exact quotations from the Coserian works. They have been summarised to allow comparison with other statements in modern theories of terminology.

Then, the initial list of terminology concepts spotted in Coseriu's studies is compared with concepts currently used in different theories of terminology such as *General Theory of Terminology* (Wüster 1979), *Communicational Theory of*

Terminology (Cabré 1999), and *Sociocognitive terminology* (Temmerman 2000). This comparison allows us to observe from a quantitative and qualitative point of view all Coserian statements on terminology. Therefore, it will be possible to state whether Coserian views have a common perspective with the theories of terminology as a discipline.

The findings of our research will be detailed in the conclusions section of this paper. They will allow us to state based on qualitative and quantitative data which of the Coserian ideas about terminology are closer to modern theories of terminology and how relevant they are.

Corpus description

Corpora are widely used for quantitative and qualitative analysis of linguistic data in a broad range of fields. They allow the observation of certain linguistic phenomena, the systematic analysis of linguistic patterns, and the thematic identification of fragments within a large amount of texts. Corpora provide the researcher with more insights into the frequency and distribution of linguistic features, allowing for an accurate interpretation of the data set. In the current research, corpus analysis provides the possibility of total accountability of Eugenio Coseriu's statements related to terminology.

The corpus created to analyse Coserian ideas about terminology is small, but highly thematic and specific. It was created following the criteria of *representativeness*, *balance*, and *topic* (John Sinclair 2005).

The corpus consists of 3 studies, published in Spanish between 1970-1980 in different volumes: *Introducción al estudio estructural del léxico* (Coseriu, 1977a), *El lenguaje y la comprensión de la existencia del hombre actual* (Coseriu, 1977b), and *Palabras, cosas y términos* (Coseriu, 1987). A fourth

Coserian study mentioning terminology was posthumously published: *Semántica y metodología* (Coseriu, 2016), edited by Benjamín García'Hernández and Jairo Javier García Sánchez.

All the files composing the corpus were stored as PDF files, in a dedicated folder. The corpus consists of 33.931 words and 77 pages of texts written by Eugenio Coseriu in Spanish and published from 1977 to 2016. The exploration of the corpus allowed us to identify and extract a list of 53 statements on terminology. For more detailed quantitative data regarding each text in the corpus, see the following table:

Title	Year of publication	No. of words	No. of pages
<i>Introducción al estudio estructural del léxico</i>	1977	15048	29
<i>El lenguaje y la comprensión de la existencia del hombre actual</i>	1977	11592	32
<i>Palabras, cosas y términos</i>	1987	4631	6
<i>Semantica y metodologia</i>	2016	2660	10

All the texts are linguistic studies, published in academic volumes with a high level of specialisation of terminology.

Eugenio Coseriu on terminology

This section will present the results of the corpus analysis, namely the complete list of the Coserian ideas identified after the exploration of the corpus. The ideas are summarised in the order of their appearance in the text. The texts are arranged in the chronological order of their publication. The main topic of each text is described before mentioning the list of terminological

references. All terminological statements must be understood within the theoretical framework of integral linguistics.

Introducción al estudio estructural del léxico (Coseriu, 1977a) is the most quoted Coserian study on terminology. The main topic of discussion is the problematic of structural semantics. Within this topic, terminology is referred only as a necessary theoretical distinction, being mentioned in several pages of the study (see pages 96-105).

The article begins with an important distinction, Coseriu mentioning that the structural study of the vocabulary excludes the study of elements such as: *proper names*, *numerals*, and *terminology*. This statement that has given rise to misinterpretation was explained later in the study *Palabras, cosas y términos*. The following ideas about terminology were identified in this study:

- a) Scientific and technical terminologies are different from the general vocabulary;
- b) Terminologies represent the use of the language for different classifications of reality / sections of reality;
- c) Partially, terminologies are not structured, they are only nomenclatures;
- d) Terminological oppositions are exclusive (each term is unique in a classification);
- e) The terms are not linguistically structured within a specialized field, therefore there is no point in searching the linguistic structure of terms;
- f) The evolution of terms is influenced by the evolution of science, not by the evolution of language;
- g) Terminologies are subidiomatic (they refer to a limited context within an idiomatic community) and interidiomatic (they refer to the same context in different idiomatic communities);

- h) Structured terminologies are not structured according to linguistic norms but according to the requirements of science and technology;
- i) Terminologies are not semantic classifications but objective classifications of reality;
- j) Words are substitutes for objects (the meaning coincides with the designation);
- k) The significata of terminologies is known to the extent that the sciences are known, not to the extent that language is known;
- l) Terminologies belong to specific universes of discourse and can only be defined in relation to them;
- m) Popular terminologies and nomenclatures imply a traditional knowledge of non-linguistic character;
- n) Popular classifications may be different from scientific classifications but they are a form of knowledge;
- o) It is difficult to distinguish terminology;
- p) Language consists of a linguistically structured lexicon and a nomenclatural and terminological lexicon;
- q) A term can turn into a common word and vice versa;
- r) “*Grado de tecnicismo*” – level of specialisation of terms.

El lenguaje y la comprensión de la existencia del hombre actual (1977b, 41-54) is a study debating the relationship between language and the understanding of the modern man. The study aims to answer the question: To what extent can a correct understanding of language contribute to the understanding of man's existence today?

In this study, the author talks about the differences between language and scientific language and states that the latter is a possibility of language. The article describes the nature of terms and scientific language. Below are statements related to terminology found in the text:

- a) Every language is the basis and instrument of objective knowledge of the world;
- b) Science is a possibility of language, an objectively motivated structure;
- c) The language of science/technology is one of the possibilities of language;
- d) [Footnote] If everyday language is content with general, less precise answers, linked to an immediate or very concrete context, scientific language asks questions and expects concrete answers;
- e) Language classes/oppositions are inclusive, term classes/oppositions are exclusive (the oppositions they enter into are inclusive for words and exclusive for terms);
- f) Ordinary words can turn into terms;
- g) Scientific language is just a special use of ordinary language => ordinary language is not just an earlier phase;
- h) Science uses language but studies and analyses objects designated as such and its utterances are about those objects. Ordinary language does not provide data about the objects themselves, it can only represent them;
- i) The symbols of technical languages (mathematics) are not of a linguistic nature, they are abbreviations;
- j) The "technicalisation" of languages – (languages contain more and more technicisms/terms) is a phenomenon that has always existed in linguistic traditions.

Palabras, cosas y términos (1987, 175-185) is a study in which Eugenio Coseriu takes up the argument about “words - things – terms” because, as he mentions at the beginning of his study, some scholars seem to have misunderstood his distinctions about terminology. Two studies are mentioned, the first discussed being that of H.J. Niederehe, in which the author considers Eugenio Coseriu's statement that terminology is not part of

semantics to be wrong. Eugenio Coseriu points out the misinterpretation of his statement and again clarifies his point of view. In the second part of the article, the author discusses G Bossong's assertion that does not agree with the Coserian claim that in terminology meaning coincides with designation.

The list of mentions of terminology identified in this study is as follows:

- a) Terminologies are not included in structural semantics but are not excluded from semantics.
- b) In order to have solid foundations, structural lexicology must recognise its limitations and leave aside the study of terminologies and nomenclatures;
- c) A technical term can be converted into a common word and vice versa.
- d) In terminology, the meaning coincides with the designation.
- e) Mentions the presence of terms outside the scientific field, this includes fields such as: social, economic, industrial techniques, popular sciences and techniques.
- f) Not all scientific terms are defined (some are fully or partially defined) although they are definable.
- g) Terms are defined with respect to the "things" designated, whereas language meanings are defined by structural semantics.
- h) "Objective delimitation" = specialized language, "intuitive delimitation" = general language;
- i) Scientific and technical delimitations and linguistic delimitations are made on different levels.

Semántica y metodología (2016), the text published posthumously and edited by Benjamín García Hernández and Jairo Javier García Sánchez, in a volume published by Peter Lang in 2016, takes as its starting point an idea put forward by Bernard

C. Heyl in *New Bearings in Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1943, Yale University Press and published in 1944 by Oxford University Press. Based on the ideas put forward by Bernard C. Heyl as a starting point, Eugenio Coseriu takes up the discussion of the semantic aspects presented in the work and considers that they should be further developed.

In this article the author states that a radical inadequacy of the human sciences has not been so far satisfactorily highlighted, namely the problems of meaning and terminology. The following ideas about terminology were gathered in this study:

- a) the features of scientific communication = terms and their meanings;
- b) the concept of "semantic insufficiency" - involves the problem of meaning and terminology;
- c) In everyday communication semantic errors are not serious, but are not at all admissible in the scientific field;
- d) In the field of science, semantic errors are much more frequent in the humane sciences than in the exact sciences;
- e) Traditional meanings are much more present in the exact sciences and concepts, even if defined differently will always have the same semantic content. The reason is that exact sciences are the result of observation, experience and conventions, while the spiritual sciences are the result of individual speculations;
- f) Only in technical languages does a term have a definite meaning, based on tacit or explicit convention;
- g) The terms do not relate directly to objects but to concepts, to individual images of objects;
- h) In the spiritual sciences, a specialised language, semantic errors are not allowed, but on the other hand, terms do not have a usage established by convention;

- i) In scientific communication it is important to define terms before using them in order to avoid semantic errors;
- j) Before using a term, it is imperative that it be defined, which is methodologically very important;
- k) In specialised languages tacit conventions must be established for mutual understanding in the scientific field.

Ideas approaching the theories of terminology

Given the different perspectives from which terminology is dealt with in Coserian studies and in current terminology theories, we consider that a comparison between these theories is necessary in order to have a clear overview of Coserian statements that come close to these theories. This means not only that Eugenio Coseriu had very clear views on terminology but also that they are relevant nowadays.

The corpus analysis has resulted in the identification of 18 statements that approach the theories of terminology as a discipline. This confirms that Eugenio Coseriu's statements about terminology are consistent and up-to-date. Furthermore, these statements have been grouped thematically in order to have a more accurate perspective on them and to avoid repetition.

The first Coserian statement about terminology that we intend to discuss is the one that has generated misinterpretations, as a result of which some terminology specialists have expressed the belief that Eugenio Coseriu excluded terminology from the scope of linguistics and linguists. The following statement is at issue:

Las terminologías científicas y técnicas no pertenecen al lenguaje ni, por consiguiente, a las estructuraciones léxicas del mismo modo que las "palabras usuales": constituyen utilizaciones del lenguaje para clasificaciones diferentes (y, en principio, autónomas) de la

*realidad o de ciertas secciones de la realidad*¹ (Coseriu, 1977a, 96).

In this quotation the author states that scientific and technical terminologies are different from general language, a basic idea in theories of terminology as a discipline. The distinction between *general language* and *specialised language* is common to all theories of terminology as a discipline and is one of the principles mentioned recurrently since the earliest studies of terminology.

The items which are characterised by special reference within a discipline are the "terms" of that discipline, and collectively they form its "terminology"; those which function in general reference over a variety of sublanguages are simply called "words" and their totality the "vocabulary" (Sager, 1990: 19).

Another Coserian statement addresses *the subidiomatic* (they refer to a limited context within an idiomatic community) and *interidiomatic* (they refer to the same context in different idiomatic communities) *character* of terminologies. Once again, this approach is very close to the perspective of terminology as a discipline. This idea has also been argued by Teresa Cabré in the theoretical framework of the *Communicative Theory of Terminology*:

Defined as the process of compiling, describing, processing and presenting the terms of special subject fields in one or more languages, terminology is not an end in itself, but addresses social needs and attempts to optimize communication among specialists

¹ Scientific and technical terminologies do not belong to language and, therefore, to lexical structures in the same way as "common words": they constitute uses of language for different (and, in general, autonomous) classifications of reality or of certain sections of reality (our translation).

and professionals by providing assistance either directly or to translators or to committees concerned with the standardization of a language (Cabré, 1999:10).

As the text shows, by their very nature, specialised languages are only used in very precisely defined contexts and, due to their *interidiomatic character*, can ensure communication between *different linguistic communities* by means of *terminological equivalences* and *specialised translation*.

In the same line of thought, the definition of *specialised / special language* in the *Handbook of Terminology* (Pavel&Nolet, 2001, 115) also refers to the *subidiomatic character* of terminologies:

specialized language / special language: Natural language used by a community of subject specialists in a particular field of knowledge (Pavel&Nolet, 2001: 115).

Another observation about terminology that comes close to the main stream theories of terminology nowadays is Coseriu's statement that "*it is difficult to distinguish terminology*". This statement is in line with the *Communicative Theory of Terminology*, according to which:

Terms and words are similar and different at the same time. [...] From a linguistic point of view, a word is a unit characterized by having a phonetic (and graphic) form, a simple or complex morphological structure, grammatical features, and a meaning that describes the class to which a specific object belongs. A term is also a unit presenting the same characteristics (Cabré, 1998: 35).

or expressed differently within the same theoretical framework:

The difference between general language (in the sense of language common to all users) and special language is difficult to establish. (Cabré, 1998: 71)

Further on, the *Communicative Theory of Terminology* proceeds to describe the characteristics of terms in order to establish the necessary distinctions between terms and ordinary words using a theoretical framework which is specific to it. Coserian argumentation in this regard takes place within the theoretical framework of integral linguistics.

Two other Coserian statements about terminologies and nomenclatures come very close to theories of terminology as a discipline. These are the statements “*Language consists of a linguistically structured lexicon and a nomenclatural and terminological lexicon.*”, “*Scientific language is just a special use of ordinary language,* and “*The language of science/technology is one of the possibilities of language*”. In the light of terminology as a discipline, there are several theoretical viewpoints on the relationship between language and specialised languages. Coserian statements in this regard are very close to the most widespread theoretical approach in terminology to date, according to Teresa Cabré:

[...] general language and special languages are two intersecting sets that, together, form the broader set of the language in its entirety [...](Cabré, 1998: 226).

Another recurrent assumption in Cosserian studies is the idea that: “*Terms can turn into words and words can turn into terms.*” We may find this assertion in the *Communicative Theory of Terminology*, stated as follows:

[...] between these two subsets [general language and special languages – our comment] there are continuous exchanges in both directions (Cabré, 1998: 226).

The concept mentioned by Eugenio Coseriu as “*Grado de tecnicismo*” is referred to in the Communicative Theory of Terminology as “*degree of specialisation*” and is a feature of scientific communication. Thus, based on a classification by Rondeau (1983), Teresa Cabré asserts the existence of several levels of abstraction of terms:

These terminologies can reflect various degrees of specialization, depending on the type of subject and the level of abstraction being dealt with (Cabré, 1998:70).

Terminology theories describe these levels of specialization in much more detail, and the level of specialization is always related to a particular specialized textual genre.

One of the statements with the highest frequency in the Coserian corpus analysed by us is the one referring to the fact that in the scientific field, unlike everyday communication, communication is objective and based on conventions mutually established in a particular field of expertise. This prevents semantic errors and ensures effective communication in the scientific domain: “In scientific communication it is important to define terms before using them in order to avoid semantic errors.”

The same principle is stated in the Communicative Theory of Terminology, with the difference that here it is specified that, ideally, in terminology each concept should be designated by a single term:

There is general agreement that special communication demands a higher level of precision than that required in general communication.

Communication without ambiguity would require each designation to correspond to a single concept and each concept could only be designated by a single term. This is clearly not the case for general language, in which words are usually polysemous and meanings can be expressed by several alternatives that are synonymous to one another (Cabr , 1998: 195).

The last statement about terminology identified in the corpus is a very important one because it is included in the General Theory of Terminology from where it was eventually taken up by the Communicative Theory of Terminology. It is a principle that still underlies terminology research in the present day. Eugenio Coseriu states that: "The terms do not relate directly to objects but to concepts, to individual images of objects." and which refers to Felber's (1999) study in which the relationship between object-concept-terms is extensively described as a fundamental element of terminological research.

As it can be seen, among Eugenio Coseriu's statements related to terminology there are quite a few very relevant ones that are in line with the fundamental precepts of the theories of terminology as a discipline. This is yet another argument in favour of the relevance of Coserian views on terminology and specialised communication.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the corpus of texts in which Eugenio Coseriu explains his theoretical view on terminology, we believe that we have achieved the objectives of our research and that we can answer with qualitative and quantitative data the questions stated in the introduction of this study.

Thus, at the moment it can be stated that there are a number of 4 Coserian studies dealing with terminology. We cannot claim that the inventory of texts is a comprehensive one, because the work of research and editing of Eugenio Coseriu's unpublished texts continues in the Eugenio Coseriu Archives in Tübingen. It is possible that in the coming years, new, as yet unedited, studies will be published, some of which may also contain references to terminology and/or scientific communication.

For the moment, what can be stated from the analysis of the corpus built up to date is that, of the 4 studies mentioned, the one containing the most references to terminology is *Introducción al estudio estructural del léxico*, which contains a total of 18 theoretical ideas on terminology. This can also be considered the most important Coserian study on terminology as it represents the largest theoretical contribution in this field. The other texts, in order of the number of ideas on terminology they contain, are: *Semántica y metodología*, with 11 ideas; *El lenguaje y la comprensión de la existencia del hombre actual*, which contains 10 ideas; and *Palabras, cosas y términos*, which contains 9 ideas.

Overall, 48 ideas about terminology were identified within the corpus. Some of these ideas are close to the principles of theories of terminology as a discipline currently used in terminology research. A total of 18 of these were identified and have been noted and grouped thematically to avoid recurrence. Comparative analysis of the Coserian ideas with those of *General Terminology Theory*, *Communicative Terminology Theory* and *Sociocognitive Terminology* allowed us to illustrate that these principles are consistent with the mainstream theories of modern terminology.

Other ideas are specific to integral linguistics and are not mentioned in other theories of terminology. Out of these, 30

statements on terminology have been identified, which we consider to be specific to integral linguistics.

The corpus analysis also requires us to check the frequency of the Coseriu statements related to terminology. Thus, the idea with the highest frequency is: "*In scientific communication it is important to define terms before using them in order to avoid semantic errors*", with 4 occurrences in the corpus, all of them being included in the study *Semantica y metodologia* (Coseriu 2016). The idea with the highest recurrence and with the best distribution within the corpus is: "*A term can turn into a common word and vice versa*", this statement being mentioned with slight variations by Eugenio Coseriu in three of his studies, namely: *Introducción al estudio estructural del léxico*, *El lenguaje y la comprensión de la existencia del hombre actual*, and *Palabras, cosas y términos*.

We hope that these insights resulting from the exploration of the corpus of Coseriu texts have contributed with convincing arguments to a better understanding of Eugenio Coseriu's theoretical perspective on terminology. We also hope to have provided convincing arguments in support of the idea that by no means did Eugenio Coseriu exclude terminology from the field of linguistics and that, as the great linguist himself points out in *Palabras, cosas y términos* (Coseriu 1987), that view was merely a misunderstanding on the part of a number of linguists.

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