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Clarity, Coherence and Communication: The Case for Standardized Administrative Language

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Abstract:

Communication in public administration requires the use of specific and precise vocabulary, employing standardized terminology that helps avoid misinterpretations or ambiguities and ensures coherence in the transmission of information. Precise and concise terminology is essential for describing complex concepts and theories in an accessible and easily understandable manner.

The language of public administration is characterized by specific, technical, and often formal terminology. However, the terms used do not always have a single, stable meaning; they can exhibit semantic variations depending on the administrative, legal, or institutional context. Such variations may lead to confusion and interpretive difficulties, particularly in communication with citizens or between institutions operating in different fields.

Semantic variations refer to the differences in meaning that a word or specialized term may carry across different contexts.

The development of communication channels both among employees and between employees and the outside world is crucial. Through communication, public administration also receives from external sources the information it needs in order to achieve its objectives.

Within any administrative structure, communication is important as it ensures the quality of existing relationships. Public communication, as the term itself suggests, operates in the public sphere, under the influence of administrative relations between the public sector employee and the citizen. Public communication involves sharing information of collective interest, as well as maintaining social relations for which public institutions are responsible.

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Introduction

Polysemic variation constitutes an inherent feature of specialized terminology, much as it does in general language. It frequently manifests through terminological metaphors, semantic transfer, and processes of semantic shift, and may, in certain instances, originate in semantic neology. Within this framework, a clear correlation can be established between conceptual variation and denominative variation. Moreover, the proliferation of denominative variants may be indicative of conceptual indeterminacy, which, in turn, can generate or reinforce conceptual variation.

The more recent or conceptually vague a notion is, the greater the number of denominative variants it tends to generate. These variants reflect the multiple nuances of the concept, shaped by different communicative contexts, authors, specialists, and schools of thought. Consequently, it is essential to examine these phenomena - denominative, conceptual, and polysemic variation - in an integrated manner. Such an approach allows for the analysis of the term and the concept as two facets of the same entity, which ultimately accounts for the considerable evocative power of terminology.

Terminology cannot be reduced to a specific vocabulary, nor can it be regarded merely as a subdiscipline of another field. Terms and concepts, as the fundamental objects of study in terminology, cannot be examined in isolation; rather, they must be analyzed in an integrated manner. Consequently, most terminological research involves a combined application of onomasiological and semasiological approaches.

In all contexts, terminology - whether addressing a specific practical need or underpinning thematic or systematic research - cannot be dissociated from the theoretical reflections and practical applications that inform it.

Moreover, the methodologies employed, which are defined in accordance with the particular requirements of each study, are grounded in pre-existing epistemological frameworks and remain intrinsically linked to specific schools of thought or theoretical orientations (whether normative or descriptive), depending on the objectives pursued.

Characteristics of administrative language

The language employed by public authorities in official documents constitutes a distinct register, carefully structured to ensure precision, legality, and the institutional character of administrative communication. It should not be regarded merely as a collection of technical terms; rather, this terminology reflects a broader culture of state functioning, encompassing the relationship between institutions and citizens, as well as the processes through which decisions are formulated, communicated, and implemented.

When terminological research is conducted in a coherent and methodologically rigorous manner, the results obtained are likely to differ substantially in both scope and significance. Empirical evidence from practice substantiates this perspective, with illustrative examples to be discussed in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that terminology encompasses all specialized domains of human knowledge, which are inherently interconnected. The close and enduring relationship between terminology and linguistics represents a significant advantage that, in our view, should not be overlooked, as it remains essential to the advancement of terminological inquiry.

The placement of terminological variation within a dual perspective - linguistic and extralinguistic - proves to be particularly relevant, as the absence of such an approach would limit the proper identification of certain phenomena. Conceptual and semantic variants can be identified only through a meticulous analysis of the textual corpus, within which the circulating information undergoes a process of decoding. For an accurate

interpretation of this information, it is necessary to adopt an extended contextual perspective that goes beyond the strictly co-textual level. In this regard, extralinguistic factors provide a pertinent analytical framework for the examination of such variations.

The phenomenon of terminological variation is no longer perceived as a source of ambiguity, but rather as an opportunity for lexical enrichment. Terms do not function merely as labels; instead, they acquire variable meanings depending on the context and communicative situation. They are characterized by a high conceptual potential, which distinguishes them from figures of speech specific to classical rhetoric, granting them the ability to convey subtle semantic nuances. Terms and concepts, regarded as an inseparable unit, exhibit flexibility and an interdisciplinary nature, adapting to the requirements of various specialized fields.

“If, in polysemy, the semantic core remains invariant and is manifested through the various uses of the polysemous lexeme, in the case of metaphor, any feature of the metaphorical lexeme, whether essential or secondary, can be transferred, as long as it facilitates the analogy for which it is used.” (Assal, 1995:23)

Terminological metaphorization begins with the transfer of both essential and secondary features; however, this process directly leads to polysemy. For this reason, we do not agree with the distinction proposed by Assal. Metaphor plays an essential role in naming and conceptualizing new realities. It operates wherever analogy can trigger any form of change, thereby enabling the use of the internal resources of language to create new terms and concepts, both in general language and in specialized discourse. On the other hand, polysemy does not represent a process, but rather a result, a linguistic reality. It is the direct outcome of metaphorization. Among the manifestations of polysemy are new meanings, semantic transfers, semantic shifts, and metaphors. The new concepts introduced through metaphor are linked to the previous meanings of the term.

It should be noted that, although it may seem unusual to discuss the metaphorical meanings of words in the language of public administration, we are all aware that language is not static; it is continuously enriched with new words that acquire new and new meanings. Administrative language is intended for human communication; therefore, it also undergoes such changes depending on the new meanings that participants attribute to terms.

Metaphorization is a frequent and valuable process in terminology, playing a role in creating new denominations that fill conceptual gaps and generate new concepts. Within the cognitive universe, words and meanings are not constrained by fixed boundaries; they circulate freely wherever imagination can evoke, signify, and conceptualize realities.

Thus, the naming of a term becomes the materialization of this mental process within metaphorization and represents a label (the signified) that leads to polysemy. This manifests in language through multiple meanings associated with the same signifier and through different references. In discourse, context and co-text help clarify the term and prevent ambiguity. However, in everyday language, it is necessary to explain and understand this process of metaphorization in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity.

In order to properly understand this phenomenon, it is essential to examine the diachronic evolution of a term's meanings, as well as to observe the ways in which its usage becomes stabilized and regulated within linguistic practice. The validation of a new sense is contingent upon subsequent developments; nevertheless, due to the efficiency of terminological metaphorization, it is highly probable that the term will preserve its relevance within its linguistic history, irrespective of its frequency of use. This period of

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adaptation varies in accordance with conceptual dynamics and the emergence of new scientific and technological realities.

Language continuously adapts to semantic change, thereby reflecting cultural and technological transformations, which confers upon terminological metaphorization a profoundly dynamic and productive character. In this respect, terminological metaphor should be understood as a complex cognitive process through which new concepts are generated, its outcome being the emergence of polysemy. In contrast to rhetorical metaphor, terminological metaphor possesses the capacity to produce conceptualizations grounded in globally accumulated knowledge.

“Thus, lexical variation and inconsistency are often related to the context in which language is used, the level of register employed, and the specific domain of the speakers. It is also observed that shifts in meaning and variation occur even in scholarly discourse, where researchers may use the same words with different meanings. Furthermore, it happens that the same speakers use multiple terms to refer to the same object or concept, even in the case of specialized technical terminology.” (Candel, 1993: 291)

In the context of international exchanges and the diversification of specialized languages, establishing clear and consistent classifications of terms within well-defined domains may become challenging. In this regard, it may be useful to reconsider these principles in order to enable a more accurate description of terminological usage and polysemous phenomena.

Such an approach would contribute to a better overall understanding of a specialized field and would highlight its interconnections with other areas of knowledge, both from a synchronic and diachronic perspective. Moreover, it would be beneficial to intensify international cooperation in order to achieve a certain degree of harmonization, within the limits of linguistic possibilities, of the terminology used in specialized languages.

The creation of new terms is directly responsible for the emergence of terminological variation, and in this respect, it is important to understand how these phenomena are interconnected, including neologism formation, metaphorization, and terminological variation. In a previous chapter, we discussed the process of terminological metaphorization and emphasized that it leads to the polysemous variation of terms.

The emergence of automatic translation systems and artificial intelligence has provided significant support, but also a trap into which uninformed individuals can easily fall. If one is not knowledgeable in a given field, one cannot simply take as valid any information that is readily provided.

According to Bărbuceanu C.D., “AI platforms actually understand on how each person learns best, they tweak how they present information, switch up the difficulty, and even adjust the speed.”(Bărbuceanu, C. D., 2025:194)

Contemporary terminology is situated at the intersection of tradition and innovation. Its inherent challenges - such as ambiguity, external influences, and the accelerated pace of change - may be addressed through critical reflection and coordinated efforts aimed at standardization. At the same time, its developmental prospects are manifold, including increased openness to interdisciplinarity, adaptation to emerging technologies, and a stronger orientation toward competence-based education. In this sense, terminology should not be understood merely as a code employed by specialists, but rather as a barometer of the profound transformations currently shaping education in the contemporary world.

According Bărbuceanu C. D., “the concept of digital literacy in the scenery of the digital age education is the ability and dexterity citizens possess in how and what language to use when suitable; it is also the facility in the digital language of technology and the capacity to critically inspect various kinds of language and texts”. (Bărbuceanu, C. D., 2020:141)

Terminology reflects not only the theoretical and institutional developments of education, but also the cultural dimension of society. It is shaped by values, traditions, mentalities, and processes of intercultural interaction, which influence the way educational concepts are formulated, used, and transformed. The cultural dimension of terminological change highlights the fact that language is a social and cultural construct in a constant state of transformation. Culture shapes vocabulary, and terminology, in turn, influences educational practices and mentalities.

According Burtea-Cioroianu C.-E., “these competences represent an integrated set of essential skills in the educational and professional context, encompassing effective communication, the ability to interact (interpersonal, intercultural), civic understanding and participation, as well as a dual dimension of culture: on the one hand, an awareness and understanding of cultural values, and on the other hand, an artistic expression and knowledge of the cultural diversity of the country where you are studying.” (Burtea-Cioroianu, 2025:173)

The modernization of terminology represents an inevitable and necessary process in the context of the social, cultural, and technological transformations of the contemporary world. Language cannot remain static, as communication itself is a living phenomenon in a continuous state of adaptation. The modernization of terminology does not consist merely in replacing old words with new ones; rather, it involves conceptual reconstruction, the refinement of meanings, and the integration of terms that more accurately reflect the reality of current communication. An important aspect of terminology modernization is the internationalization of discourse.

At the same time, the modernization of terminology is influenced by the emergence of digital technologies and their impact on individuals. This process is not without difficulties. At times, the proliferation of new terms may generate confusion, while the overlap between traditional and modern terminology creates ambiguities. Moreover, there is a risk that terms borrowed from other languages are used superficially, without a deep understanding of the concepts they represent. For this reason, the modernization of administrative terminology must be accompanied by systematic efforts of clarification, standardization, and cultural adaptation.

The modernization of administrative terminology is a continuous process that reflects the dynamic relationship between language and society. It expresses the need to describe contemporary realities, to integrate innovations, and to provide a common language for specialists in the field. Through this process, administrative terminology asserts its relevance and its capacity to respond to present-day challenges, while at the same time preparing the ground for future transformations.

According Stoian, A., “although it may be true that for English learners, this language, as any other foreign language, can have a lot of pitfalls, learning the appropriate connectors can help them achieve a satisfying level of English”. (Stoian, A., 2024:211)

The field of virtual learning has imposed, over the past two decades, a true revolution in terminology. The emergence of digital environments, the development of the internet, and the widespread use of online resources have introduced into administrative language a series of new terms, often borrowed from English and adapted

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to the specific features of Romanian educational discourse. These terms are not just simple linguistic labels, but reflect substantial transformations in the way communication in the administrative field is conceived, organized, and carried out.

“The notion of discourse immediately faces two difficulties. The first is the relationship between monologue and dialogue. The second is that of the co-presence of two terms, discourse and text”. (Chirișescu, Păunescu, 2025:98)

Administrative language, like any specialized register, has always sought a clear, rigorous form adapted to the demands of education. The definition of administrative language has thus started from the need to construct a conceptual framework in which specialized notions acquire an unambiguous meaning, avoiding the confusions inherent in everyday language.

However, this definition has never been definitive. Administrative language is, by its very nature, living and dynamic, reflecting societal transformations, shifts in paradigms, and the concrete needs of a constantly changing society. In the modern period, its redefinition has become an essential condition for the progress of the science of specialized language.

The process of redefinition is never linear. Tensions constantly arise between tradition and innovation, between already established concepts and the need to adapt to contemporary realities. Some terms remain in administrative language as stable reference points, while others evolve or disappear. This ongoing movement reflects not only developments in public administration, but also the dynamics of the broader world in which specialized communication takes place.

Thus, language in the field of public administration can be seen as an open construction, engaged in a continuous process of definition and redefinition. It is shaped by academic research, educational policies, new technologies, and practical experience gained in the field through communication between public administration employees and citizens at service counters. Its definition is necessary for coherence and scientific communication; its redefinition is inevitable in order to maintain relevance and up-to-dateness in relation to societal change.

Ultimately, administrative language is not merely a technical tool, but also a mirror of how humanity understands the importance of education, and of how it projects its future through the training of new generations of specialists.

Placing terminological variation within both a linguistic and an extralinguistic perspective is highly beneficial, as without such an approach certain phenomena could not be adequately observed. Conceptual and semantic variants can only be identified through a careful analysis of texts, in which circulating information is decoded. In order to correctly understand this information, it is necessary to adopt a contextual perspective that goes beyond the mere analysis of co-text. These extralinguistic causes provide a useful framework for analyzing such variants.

“Translation is an exercise in interpreting ideas, which requires a lot of mental agility and writing skill. Also, knowledge of the two languages, the one from which one is translating and the one into which one is translating, are essential things.” (Chirișescu, Păunescu, 2025:33)

Communication in the field of public administration represents the process through which state institutions transmit information, decisions, and services to citizens and receive feedback from them. It is characterized by clarity, rigor, and formality, having the role of ensuring transparency, efficiency, and the proper functioning of the relationship between authorities and the public.

According to Scorțan D., “the psycho-affective dimension in building a team is not negligible. Of course, it is easier to work with people „that we like”, but the question that arises is rather to know how to work together while going beyond emotional divisions. It is important to design the work in team as a skill to be acquired and not as an eventuality subject to affinities.” (Scorțan, D., 2024:145)

Communication in public administration also plays a crucial role in ensuring democratic governance and institutional accountability. Through effective communication strategies, public institutions are able to increase accessibility, reduce informational asymmetries, and strengthen public trust. In the context of digital transformation, administrative communication has become increasingly complex, integrating both traditional channels and digital platforms. This evolution requires not only linguistic precision, but also adaptability to diverse audiences and communication contexts, in order to maintain efficiency and coherence in public service delivery.

To fully understand what administrative and political discourse analysis is, it is necessary to determine what can be identified as discourse of this type. The easiest way to identify political discourse is through its authors or actors; that is, an administrative discourse can be recognized as such as a consequence of the person who delivered it, namely the directly involved individual. In this sense, “the main actors in public administration are the group of individuals, elected or appointed as central actors within it, who are paid for their activities in the service of the community.” (Van Dijk, 1997: 13)

The vocabulary used in public administration is characterized by a high degree of formality, precision, and clarity, being adapted to the needs of official communication between institutions and citizens. It includes specialized terminology, standardized expressions, and fixed formulations designed to ensure coherence and uniformity in administrative documents.

An important feature of this vocabulary is the frequent use of legal-administrative terms such as “decision,” “regulation,” “competence,” “procedure,” or “authority,” which reflect the normative nature of the field. Moreover, there is a noticeable trend toward internationalization and modernization, through the adoption of English loanwords, particularly in the context of administrative digitalization.

In addition, administrative language avoids ambiguity and subjective expressions, favoring impersonal formulations and rigorous syntactic structures. Thus, the vocabulary of public administration contributes to ensuring transparency, efficiency, and accuracy in institutional communication.

Terminological variations within the terminology of public administration highlight the complexity and dynamism of a field situated at the intersection of specialized language, legal normativity, and the need for comprehensibility in the relationship with citizens. Public administration, as a living system in continuous transformation, directly reflects the social, political, legislative, and technological changes of a society. In this context, the terminology specific to this field is far from being static or uniform, undergoing significant lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and even stylistic variations.

The identified terminological variations can be viewed from several perspectives: those resulting from institutional reforms, the evolution of the legislative framework, or the alignment with European Union standards and practices; those generated by external linguistic influences, especially from English, as a consequence of globalization and the internationalization of administrative discourse; as well as those arising from actual everyday usage, where regional, contextual, or institutional differences lead to the use of equivalent terms or even to ambiguities.

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Another important aspect highlighted is the delicate relationship between terminological precision - essential for the clarity of norms and administrative acts - and linguistic accessibility, necessary for effective communication with the general public. This tension requires a balance between the technical rigor of specialized language and the democratic imperatives of transparency and inclusion. Moreover, the role of administrative language in building trust between citizens and institutions cannot be underestimated: a clear, coherent, and unified language contributes to strengthening a climate of trust and mutual respect.

Conclusions

Communication, situated at the core of human activity, constitutes a fundamental factor in structuring and carrying out interactions between individuals and the organizations to which they belong. In the context of sustainable development, this dimension acquires increased relevance, reflecting the complexity of contemporary social and institutional relationships. Within communicative exchange processes, the full dynamics of linguistic activity associated with the discourse of sustainable development can thus be observed. However, prior to analyzing linguistic determinants, it is necessary to emphasize the essential role of the human being, as an agent of communication, in generating this activity. Consequently, communicational causes emerge as central elements of the analytical approach.

The language used in the field of public administration is a specialized one, with technical terminology; however, in the end, communication takes place between two or more participants, most often one of them being an informed actor (the public administration employee), while the other or others are non-specialized actors (the citizen or citizens). Communication must be understood by both parties. Therefore, it is essential that the language used be the same and that the participants show mutual understanding toward one another.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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