

# Bioscientific terminology work in Sweden

## Following in the footsteps of the Joint Group for Swedish Computer Terminology

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Biosciences or life sciences are said to be the next technical revolution after computers and the Internet, so why not suppose that life sciences may also be the next important field of cooperation in terminology? There might not be as many hobby molecular biologists sequencing DNA in their kitchen sink as there are hobby hackers and surfers, but with Dolly the sheep, DNA fingerprints and GMOs, basic molecular genetics are getting more and more into the public consciousness. The Joint Group for Swedish Computer Terminology, which will be presented later on today, was founded in 1996, and it has had successors in several other countries, e.g. Norway, Finland, and Greece. Last year, the Joint Group for Swedish Life Science Terminology was founded, and I hope we will get successors too. The organizational form used by both Swedish groups, called the JOGSCOT model after The Joint Group for Swedish Computer Terminology, has proved to be very successful, and I will soon say more about it. But first some words about why a life science terminology network is such a good idea.

The idea of creating a terminological network within the field of life sciences has been welcomed by scientists as well as journalists and terminologists in Sweden, and the initial work has been characterized

by enthusiasm and active discussions. I see three main reasons for this positive response, beside the fact that until now, there has not been any major attempt to coordinate Swedish terminology within the life sciences.

1. The field of life sciences is growing rapidly, which means that new concepts and terms are created every day. A terminological network will improve the chances of keeping concepts clear and well-defined and creating and disseminating well motivated terms. Naturally, this is a simplification, since scientific concepts do not stay the same forever, but also changes can be reflected and reacted to in a network.

2. The field, as already mentioned, concerns many people, not only scientists, but also, for example, nurses, policemen, insurance companies and the general public. For the general public, this is foremost a question of democracy, about who has the right to information about scientific results. The network will not only be an experts' area, and, in fact, not only a terminology network. It will also offer a possibility for anyone to easily reach scientific information in their mother tongue. On our web site, the term records will be linked to Swedish texts about the concepts. Sometimes this more

pedagogic ambition slows down our work, but in my opinion, creating a small science center on the web offers far-reaching opportunities which we should make use of.

3. The field is international, which in this case for example means that problems may arise when terms are transferred between languages without anyone analysing the underlying concepts. That is why it is important to make our terminology efforts international as well, or at least European, for a start.

And a good start for European cooperation would be joint groups for life science terminology in more countries. To make it easier for you to follow our example, I will tell you how to organize such a group – that is, introduce the JOGSCOT model to you. First of all, in the heart of the group there has to be both life science experts and linguists/terminologists. The active "inner circle" of the Joint Group for Swedish Life Science Terminology consists of a working team of 14 scientists, journalists and terminologists. We meet once a month to discuss concept definitions and agree on Swedish term recommendations. Between meetings we continue the discussions via e-mail. In addition to the working team there is a larger group (another 20) to which the definitions and recommendations are sent (e-mailed) for consideration. Continually, the result of our work will be freely available on a web site. To keep the information free of charge, the group has to be sponsored. Our money comes from The Swedish Academy, The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, The Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research and TNC, The Swedish Centre for Technical Terminology.

Since the start in September, the working team has had four meetings, exchanged hundreds of e-mails and sent a list of 55 term records to the larger group for consideration. Most concepts are from the field of basic genetics (DNA, genome, diploid, etc.), but some are more complicated, like functional genomics and translational research. For some concepts we have also recommended new Swedish terms. All these terms are now on our web site and more terms are on their way. At least two of our new Swedish recommendations have been accepted and used by important science organizations/foundations in Sweden. We have got interesting term questions from several scientists and positive reactions to the answers we have given them. We will participate in the International Science Festival in Gothenburg in May, and I am here in Paris today.

Part of the favourable reception of our work might be due to an increased awareness of the need for interdisciplinary projects combining language and natural sciences. That is why I would like to close my speech by emphasizing a fact that becomes more and more clear to me in the work of the Joint Group for Swedish Life Science Terminology. It has often been said that terminology is interdisciplinary by nature, but unfortunately, terminology education is not as interdisciplinary as it could – and should – be. Too often, at universities, terminology is taught only to language students, which I do not think is sufficient. When I studied terminology, as a part of my language consultancy education, I was the only one really interested in the subject. I am convinced that the reason was that I, as a molecular biologist, was the only one having a second subject field on which to implement my new skills. Thereby, I could combine theoretical terminology insights with real needs in science. That is why I think that terminology teaching should not be isolated to language institutions and language research institutes. In order not to be just another field of research, terminology needs to be integrated into the practical work of experts. Certainly, terminology is needed in translation and localisation, but it is even more needed before that, when concepts and terms are created. In order to make terminology practical and applied, there is a need for an expanded terminology education and a close cooperation between different university institutions, terminologists, and experts outside the universities. And I think that the Joint Group for Swedish Computer Terminology and the Joint Group for Swedish Life Science Terminology are good examples of what such a cooperation may look like.

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*Sous le haut patronage de Bernard Cerquiglini,  
vice-président du Conseil supérieur de la langue française,  
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