

National terminology policy: Practical insights and applications

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Make today matter



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Aim of this presentation

- Discuss role of policies within terminology:
 - National terminology policies and institutional terminology policies
- Provide very brief overview of salient points in draft National Terminology Policy (NTP)
- Identify and discuss challenges **within** the proposed NTP
- Propose possible solutions to the challenges identified
- Chart possible way forward

Importance of a national terminology policy 1/2

- A formal framework adopted by a country to guide the
 - planning,
 - development,
 - standardisation,
 - management, and
 - dissemination of terminology across all its official languages within specific subject field.

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Importance of a national terminology policy 2/2

- Key elements
 - Scope: national level
 - Purpose: Terminology should be consistent, standardised and accessible
 - Multilingualism: Promotes the development of official languages as functional languages within specific subject fields
 - Infrastructure: Typically establishes structures like a national terminology office, a national term bank, coordination mechanisms for authoritative bodies
 - Standards: Often aligned with international frameworks

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Importance of an institutional terminology policy 1/2

- An internal framework adopted by a specific institution to guide the
 - planning,
 - development,
 - standardisation,
 - management, and
 - dissemination of terminology within its own infrastructure.

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Importance of an institutional terminology policy 2/2

- Key elements
 - Scope: Limited to an institution's activities
 - Purpose: Consistent and accurate use of terminology across the different facets of an institution
 - Alignment: Draws on the national terminology policy and/or other relevant legal language frameworks related to language & terminology
 - Adapts to an institution's language needs, policies and priorities
 - Sustainability: Provides guidance on maintaining terminology management systems and databases

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Significant difference

- National terminology policy = macro-level, all the official languages
- Institutional terminology policy = micro-level, languages generally promoted by an institution's language policy

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Summary of proposed NTP

1/5

Background & purpose

- Policy addresses need for for **systematic terminology development and management** in SA
- Positions terminology as critical enabler of:
 - **Multilingualism** (promoting all 11 official languages + sign language)
 - **Access to knowledge** in education, law, science, technology, and governance
 - **Socio-economic participation** by ensuring terminology resources are available and standardised

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Summary of proposed NTP

2/5

Identified problem areas

- **Fragmentation & Lack of Coordination**
 - Multiple institutions (universities, NLUs, SADiLaR, PanSALB, government departments) involved in terminology work; efforts are **fragmented and duplicated**
 - Absence of central coordinating mechanism leads to inconsistent terminology development

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Summary of proposed NTP

3/5

Identified problem areas

- **Limited Access & Awareness**
 - Terminological resources often **inaccessible** to end-users, e.g. educators, students, professionals, general public
 - Lack of awareness campaigns - many stakeholders unaware of existing resources

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Summary of proposed NTP

4/5

Identified problem areas

- **Inadequate Capacity & Funding**
 - Shortage of trained terminologists, lexicographers, translators and language technologists
 - Terminology development **underfunded** and seen as peripheral compared to language policy

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Summary of proposed NTP

5/5

Identified problem areas

- **Unequal Language Representation**
 - **African languages lag behind** English and Afrikaans in terminology development, especially in technical and scientific fields
 - This perpetuates inequality in knowledge access

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Purpose of proposed SA National Terminology Policy

- Coordination and management of terminology
- Supporting multilingualism and equity
- Knowledge development and access
 - Terminology as a strategic national source
 - Use of correct and standardised terminology
- Institutional support and capacity
- Practical interventions

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Current status of the SA NTP

- Developed by Dr Mariëtta Alberts, Dr Roger Layton & Sholeen Shanker from Roger Layton Associates, for
- Terminology Coordination Section (TCS) of the National Language Service (NLS) of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC)
- Currently in draft form, under discussion by National Government, expected to be released in January 2026
- NLS will be responsible for implementation

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Possible challenges within proposed SA NTP 1/4

- Coordination and fragmentation
 - Multiple institutions may still work in silos
 - Duplication of subject fields and duplication and proliferation of terms
 - Risk of inconsistent approaches to terminology development
- Capacity constraints and skills shortage to train terminologists and subject field experts
 - Shortage of structured training programmes at higher education institutions; consequently,
 - Limited technical expertise
 - Lack of theoretical grounding in terminology as independent discipline

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Possible challenges within proposed SA NTP 2/4

- Funding and resources
 - Scarce resources for large-scale digitisation, training and dissemination
 - Dependence on external partners without fixed budgets
- Language equality
 - Lack of resources in the African languages make the development of highly specialised terminology (science, medicine), quite challenging
 - South African Sign Language (SASL) technically more demanding

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Possible challenges within proposed SA NTP 3/4

- Technological infrastructure
 - The National Term Bank (NTB) and National Terminology Register (NTR), require robust, interoperable systems
 - Risk of poor integration between institutional databases and national systems
 - Long-term sustainability of digital infrastructure uncertain
- Adoption and awareness
 - Limited resources available to promote terminology work, may remain unused or unknown
 - Possible entrenched to adopting new terminology, especially if existing terms are established

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Possible challenges within proposed SA NTP 4/4

- Governance and accountability
 - The Terminology Coordination Section (TCS) of the National Language Service (NLS) is officially given the role of *coordinating* all terminology work
 - Unit is small, underfunded, capacity constraints
- Several authoritative bodies involved
 - Without strong coordination, authoritative bodies can duplicate work, disagree on standards, compete for resources
- Monitoring compliance and measuring impact
 - Who will check whether authoritative bodies are implementing the NTP?
 - Measuring impact: Not enough to develop terms – must determine whether terms are taken up by the linguistic community

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified 1/7

Goosen & Taljard (2025:444-445)

- Terminology development should not (only) be seen as a *top-down approach*, but also as *bottom-up approach*.
- Not exclusively initiated by a given government
- Terminology development can be done on different levels
 - Macro-level
 - Done on national level
 - Done within the context of language planning
 - Not necessarily done for the purposes of return on investment (ROI)
 - Language needs of the target users identified and provided for by a given government

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified 2/7

Goosen & Taljard (2025:444-445)

- Meso-level
 - State-owned enterprises (SOEs) in collaboration with other authoritative bodies, such as universities
 - Terminology management by SOEs, other public entities and terminology management for academic purposes
 - It is accepted that a government and its departments should make terminological resources available to the public (Warburton 2024)
 - At this level terminological information is used internally or made available to the public to meet specific needs of language communities.
 - Example: South African Revenue Service (SARS)

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified 3/7

Goosen & Taljard (2025:444-445)

- Micro-level
 - Mainly carried out within a commercial context (ROI), language communities' initiatives
 - Terminological information focuses on a unique brand, service or product
 - Promotes specialised communication within a company/organisation, and
 - between a given company/organisation and its customers
 - Example: financial institutions, medical aid schemes, telecommunication companies

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified 4/7

- National terminology roundtable
 - Share challenges, solutions, progress
- Use current infrastructure, open repositories
 - GitHub
 - LwimiLinks*
- Guidelines
 - Short, practical
- Accreditation
 - Recognise institutions or projects that comply with recognised terminology principles, e.g., ISO 704 (Terminology work – principles and methods)

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified

5/7

- Best practices
 - Case studies, templates, terminology workflows
- Mentorship programmes
- Internships
- Develop shared postgraduate modules between SA universities, short online courses
- International collaboration
- Open-source software, sophisticated software
- Community-funded terminology projects

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified

6/7

- Formal coordination council
 - Standing council, rotating chairpersons between the different stakeholders
- Clear division of tasks and responsibilities of each authoritative body
- Annual joint reporting
 - Sent to DSAC for oversight
- Independent audit teams
 - Outsource periodic reviews to academic institutions or auditors
- Public dashboards
 - Publish online dashboards showing progress by institution, creates transparency and peer accountability

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Possible solutions to the challenges identified 7/7

- Conditional funding
 - Budget allocations linked to compliance with agreed frameworks and delivery of measurable outputs
- Usage surveys
- Citation tracking
- Digital analytics
- Case studies
- Feedback loops

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Open-source national terminological platform 1/6

LwimiLinks (<https://lwimilinks.sadilar.org/>)

- Background information
 - SADiLaR conducted an audit at SA public higher education institution
 - Highlighted areas that require attention
- LwimiLinks described as “a place for multilingual terminology and other useful language resources”
- Institutions are encouraged to submit their resources to be uploaded, and
- register terminology-related projects.
- Disseminated through the site to students, language practitioners, academics, etc.

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Open-source national terminological platform 2/6

- Current challenges
 - The system currently does not adhere to certain international standards for terminology products
 - Constraints with supported file types
 - Only institutional terminological resources can be uploaded
 - Resources and projects submitted via email
 - Capacity constraints and funding constraints

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Open-source national terminological platform 3/6

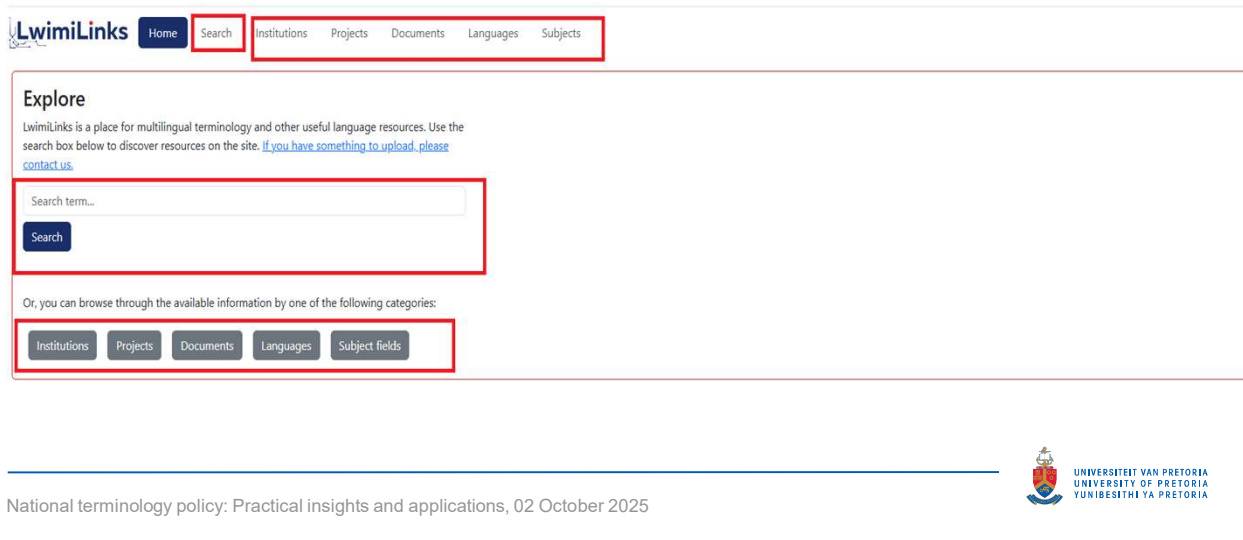
- Institutions very enthusiastic to share data, but hesitant to make it available on an open-source national platform
 - Intellectual property
 - Recognition
 - Funding incentives
 - Integration costs
 - Sustainability

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Open-source national terminological platform 4/6

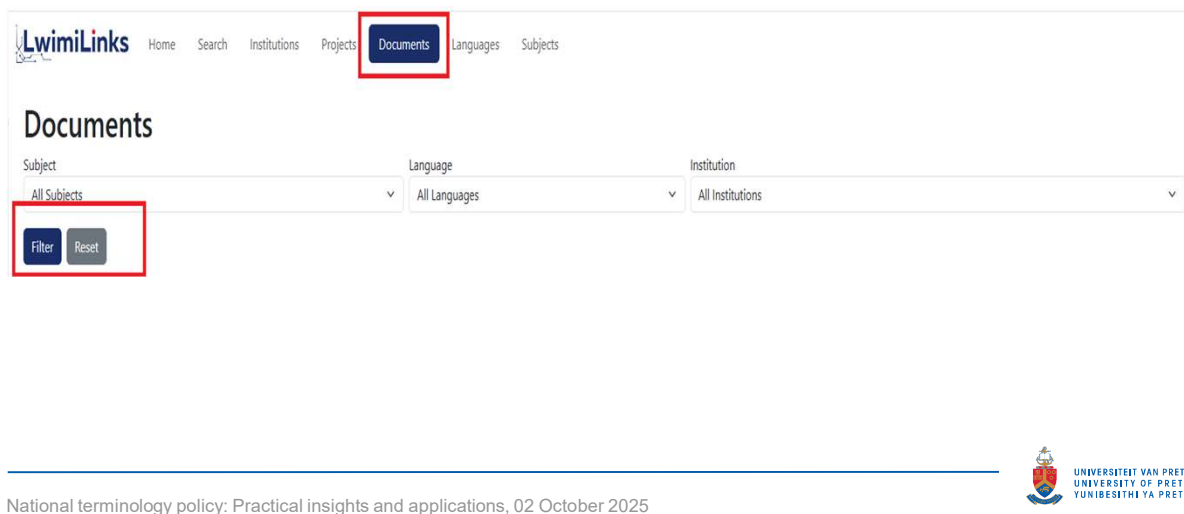
<https://lwimilinks.sadilar.org/>



The screenshot shows the LwimiLinks homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the LwimiLinks logo and links for Home, Search, Institutions, Projects, Documents, Languages, and Subjects. The 'Search' link is highlighted with a red box. Below the navigation bar, there is an 'Explore' section. It contains a search box with the placeholder text 'Search term...' and a 'Search' button. Below the search box, there is a message: 'LwimiLinks is a place for multilingual terminology and other useful language resources. Use the search box below to discover resources on the site. [If you have something to upload, please contact us.](#)'. Below this message, there is a row of buttons for 'Institutions', 'Projects', 'Documents', 'Languages', and 'Subject fields'. The 'Institutions' button is highlighted with a red box. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text 'National terminology policy: Practical insights and applications, 02 October 2025' and the University of Pretoria logo.

Open-source national terminological platform 5/6

<https://lwimilinks.sadilar.org/>



The screenshot shows the LwimiLinks 'Documents' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the LwimiLinks logo and links for Home, Search, Institutions, Projects, Documents, Languages, and Subjects. The 'Documents' link is highlighted with a red box. Below the navigation bar, there is a 'Documents' section. It contains three dropdown menus for 'Subject', 'Language', and 'Institution'. The 'Subject' dropdown is set to 'All Subjects', the 'Language' dropdown is set to 'All Languages', and the 'Institution' dropdown is set to 'All Institutions'. Below the dropdown menus, there are 'Filter' and 'Reset' buttons. The 'Filter' button is highlighted with a red box. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text 'National terminology policy: Practical insights and applications, 02 October 2025' and the University of Pretoria logo.

Open-source national terminological platform 6/6

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Documents

No documents available for this subject.

Projects

[IsiChazamazwi sabahumushi](#)

Arts and culture

Documents

[Multilingual Arts and Culture Intermediate Phase](#)

Projects

No projects available for this subject.

Astronomy

Documents

No documents available for this subject.

Projects

[IsiChazamazwi sabahumushi](#)

Biology

Documents

No documents available for this subject.

Projects

[IsiChazamazwi sabahumushi](#)

Chemistry

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Vision for LwimiLinks 1/3

- An open-source terminology database
 - Sustainability
 - Minimum requirements according to international standards have already been established
 - Collaboration between different authoritative bodies
 - Providing training and presenting workshops on terminology development
- End product
 - Multilingual terminology portal allowing linguistic and concept map searches

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Vision for LwimiLinks 2/3

Knowledge-based approach to terminology (<https://wipopearl.wipo.int/en/linguistic>)

Home > WIPO Pearl > Linguistic Search

WIPO Pearl - Linguistic Search

Concept Map Search

Search options | Reset

37 HITS for beverage [Filters](#)

Source language: All Target language: All Subject field: All

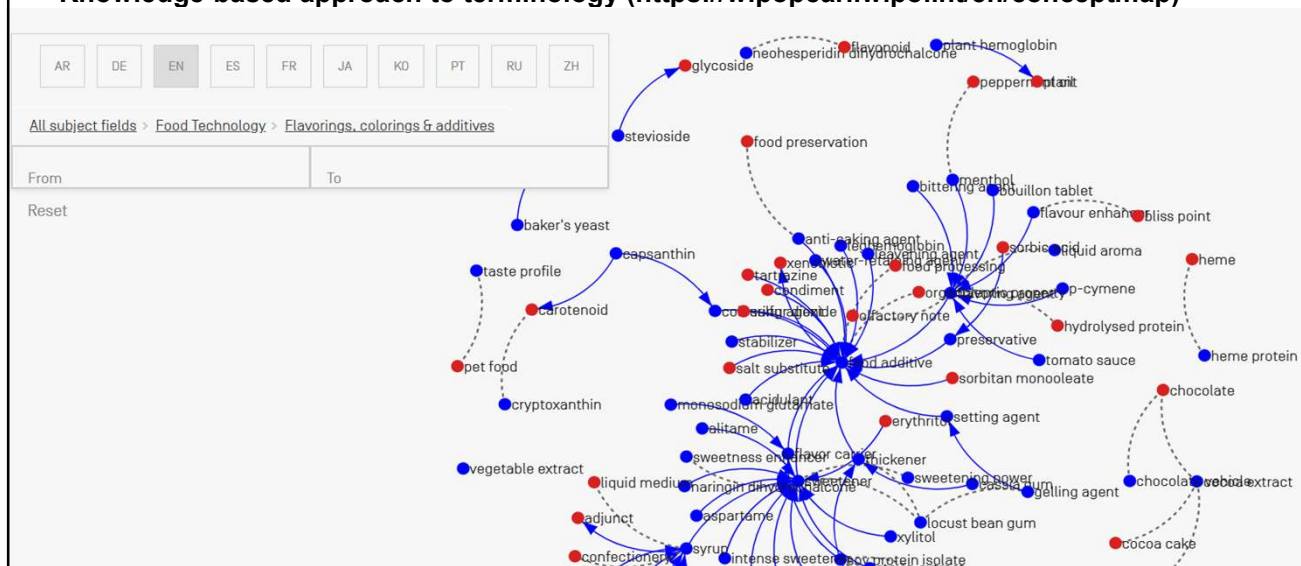
Terms: beverage (FOOD), beverage dispenser (PACK), alcoholic beverage (FOOD)...

FOOD / Beverages & beverage processing [Show full record](#)

AR	مشروب	Reliability 3 / 4	***
EN	beverage	Reliability 3 / 4	***
The best way to obtain the water your body needs is by drinking plain water. However, other beverages, such as fruit juices, milk, and non-caffeinated drinks are also excellent sources of water. [...] Beverages are generally marketed as either a prepackaged liquid, to be consumed 'as is,' or as powdered or concentrated beverage mix to be added to water or milk, [...].			
US20050126632			

Vision for LwimiLinks 3/3

Knowledge-based approach to terminology (<https://wipopearl.wipo.int/en/conceptmap>)



Conclusion

- NTP framework for consistency, standardisation and access
- Terminology development is currently fragmented, underfunded, duplication of efforts
- Practical solutions given to implement the NTP successfully
- Beyond developing terms
 - Focus on adoption and use of terminology within linguistic communities
- Open-source platforms like LwimiLinks can be developed in a sustainable terminology product according to international standards

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