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On your terms: Terminology management defines the success of international product launches

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On Your Terms

Terminology Management Defines the Success of International Product Launches

 Whether you're dealing with products or services, effective terminology management makes the difference between the long-term success and failure of products released to overseas markets.

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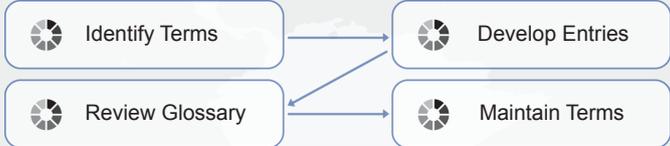
Terminology Management at a Glance



Terminology management is the process of systematically developing, collecting, maintaining and presenting words that have special meaning and application in a given subject field. The emphasis here is on the word systematically, because the goal of terminology management is to actualize a system that ensures that the words most closely associated with a given organization's products, services, and branding are used consistently across the board.

When applied to enterprise-level localization, consistency comprises a reconciliation of terminology between departments, in addition to a standardization of terms across all documents and languages. Depending on the size of an organization, effective terminology management can be a monumental task. Nevertheless, attaining terminological consistency has clear benefits for companies engaging in international product launches. The organized dispersal of clearly defined terminology has proven to save time and money, as well as improve the overall uniformity of brand experience.

The following is a high-level overview of the terminology management process.





Identification of Key Terms

First, an organization needs to identify the words that are important enough to be used consistently within and across documents. This is no small task. If an organization already has a team of terminology stakeholders (e.g., representatives from product development, technical communications, marketing communications, and legal services) in place, their job is to collaboratively decide on terminology before development and authoring begins. The challenge here is, first and foremost, to get everyone in the same room. In the case of a mid-to-large sized international company, these stakeholders might not be in the same location, nor even in the same time zone. Once everyone has come together, the second challenge is to reach a consensus on terminology among vastly diverging interests.

For organizations that have not yet instituted a circle of terminology managers, but have recognized the importance of controlled multilingual content (which is the most common scenario in the business world today), they have to take a more post-hoc approach to terminology management. This usually involves the colossal task of accumulating a wide variety of relevant documents (including specifications, software help menus, manuals, marketing collateral, etc.) and scrutinizing them for key terminology. Owing to the sheer volume of legacy content that the average company is dealing with, this process is usually facilitated with tools that automatically extract reoccurring terms, which are then individually analyzed and prepared for further development.

Development of Entries

Once an organization has identified the terms that should be included in their glossary, the next step is to determine how much supporting information is needed. There is much debate among terminologists over whether or not it makes good business sense to collect any information beyond a simple list of terms. For example, the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) terminology standard 12620 specifies almost 200 possible data categories for a single terminological entry, and yet ISO 12616 lists only three of those as mandatory, i.e., term, source, and date. Generally speaking, the most practical solution for most organizations is to produce a data model that involves less than two dozen data categories that are specifically catered to their particular terminology management needs. After coming up with a suitable data model, a company needs to then populate their terminology entries.



Review and Approval of Glossaries and Termbases

The importance of commissioning subject matter experts to evaluate monolingual and multilingual terminology collections prior to their publication is of the utmost importance. As de facto warehouses of corporate knowledge, glossaries and termbases are normative documents that are ideally embedded throughout the entire product development chain. If properly put to use, they are employed by all departments and communicators within an organization. This includes vendors of communication services, such as PR, marketing, advertising and translation agencies. Because of this, it is imperative that an expert—who is intimately familiar with both the organization itself and the domains covered by the terminological collection—signs off on each entry.

To this end, it is common to employ a reviewer who focuses on the accuracy of definitions and, based on the requirements of the organization sponsoring the terminology project, decides which terms should be used (preferred terms) and which terms should be avoided (deprecated terms). The same review process should also be repeated for each target language in a multilingual glossary. A reviewer with subject matter expertise, who lives and works in the country where the target language is spoken, should scrutinize each term entry and its translation for cultural and linguistic accuracy.



Definitions

Interestingly enough, definitions are an optional data category in all major terminology standards. Granted, writing definitions can easily be the most time-consuming and costly step in the terminology development process. Nevertheless, term definitions remain to be the most valuable part of an entry, especially if an organization employs its termbase as a repository for company knowledge, which many do. It's the definition, after all, that helps an engineer pick the correct term from a range of options, and it's the definition that enables a new employee to better understand an unfamiliar concept.

Terminology Maintenance

The only constant in business is change, and this adage is especially true of terminology management. As both technology and language are constantly evolving, so should glossaries and termbases. In order to provide internal and external teams alike with the most relevant and up-to-date terminology, organizations must continuously expand their terminology repositories with new and emerging terms. Beyond that, existing terms must also be evaluated for validity on a regular basis. The development and continuous management of termbases is an ongoing process to which companies must systematically attend in order to maximize the reuse of content, minimize terminological discrepancies between documents, and unify the presentation of their products and services in the global market.



Five Reasons Why You Should Manage Terminology



Streamlined Authoring and Editing

Having a comprehensive, project-specific termbase available at the outset of a project frees developers and writers from the tedious task of researching terms on their own. This not only saves time, but it reduces the risk of multiple communicators accidentally coining different terms for the same feature. Effective terminology management can curb this risk. With a collection of approved terminology organized in a central location, developers, writers, editors, reviewers and translators can increase the speed—and thus, volume—of their output.

This reduces time-to-market.

Coherent Documentation

Any communication aimed at informing consumers must be consistent in the naming of features and functions to maximize the usability of a product or service. The challenge is to maintain terminological consistency not only within a given document but also across all documents, document types, and even languages. For example, the term used for a menu item in a software application must appear the same on all screens, as well as on every page in the online help system and all pages in the user manual that deal with that particular function. If there are any inconsistencies, users might get frustrated and confused, resulting in otherwise unnecessary—and costly—calls to support centers.

This reduces post-sales support.



Consistent Corporate Communication

Terminology management enables organizations of any size to use the same terms consistently within and across the different types of communication that accompany a product or service. Typical communication types include specifications, drawings, user interfaces, software strings, help systems, technical documentation, marketing materials, and documents for regulatory submission, etc. As multiple authors typically contribute to these forms of written communication, terminology management is the most efficient solution for ensuring that an entire organization speaks with one voice.

This improves brand image.

Faithfulness to the Source

Two cardinal translation standards, ASTM F2575 and CEN EN 15038, describe the creation of project-specific, multilingual termbases as an industry best practice. Linguists who maintain glossaries in Excel spreadsheets, Word tables, or PDF documents have to interrupt the translation process and perform an active search each time they come across an unknown term. In addition, the outcome of that search is uncertain, as the translator typically does not know whether the unknown term is actually included in the glossary or not. The translator also has no efficient way of distinguishing old terms from new terms, or deprecated terms from preferred ones, etc.

Just as post-hoc reactions to terminology management are costly and time-consuming, correcting inconsistencies and translation errors post-publication can be financially detrimental to a company on a tight budget. Terminology-related inconsistencies often go undetected in complicated, large, or time-sensitive projects, which can cause confusion for the consumer, as well as unnecessary delays, non-compliance, and expensive revisions in order to attain terminological harmony. Maintaining a comprehensive glossary before project kickoff therefore enables a company to control translation at the source, giving rise to textual fidelity, and enabling linguists to translate even the most terminologically challenging texts without interruption.

This saves money.

Dispersible Intellectual Assets

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This improves quality.



Supplementing Translation Memory



Many language service providers use a translation memory system for storing and reusing translations. While it is true that a translation memory makes it possible to retrieve translated sentences in addition to sub-sentential elements, such as terminology, the concordance features generally present in translation memory systems are no substitute for creating a termbase.

And this is why:

Translation memory tools query both translation memories and termbases during the analysis of a text. When a mature termbase is integrated into a translation memory environment, if the source sentence in question contains any terms that are present in the termbase, these terms (and their translations as well) are automatically presented to the translator. In other words, the translator doesn't have to lift a finger in order to find appropriate, up-to-date translations for every critical term stored in the termbase, as dictionary lookup functions are typically automatic.

In contrast, the concordance functions in translation memory systems are manual lookup tools that enable translators to search translation memories for linguistic matches on the sub-segment (that is, phrase, compound, or word) level. As translation memory systems customarily operate on a phrase or sentence level, it is common for translators to encounter terms in a source sentence for which there is no direct match in translation memory provided.



When a translation memory tool does not automatically return a match, translators can only select part of the source sentence, e.g., a single word or term, and manually search the translation memory on this more granular level. With any luck, the translation memory tool will return segments that contain the term in question, at which point translators have to identify the matching term in the target segment and translate accordingly. The concordance search as described above is problematic for three reasons.

In the absence of a termbase, translation memories typically contain synonyms, i.e., multiple translations, abbreviated forms and variants of the same term, making it very difficult—if not impossible—for teams of translation professionals to consistently pick the same translated term.

Translation productivity significantly decreases when performing concordance searches. While dictionary lookup is automatic (as mentioned above), concordance searches are manual by necessity.

Concordance searches may return many hits (unlike a dictionary lookup, wherein searches generally only return a single dictionary entry), which require more time spent on analysis and selection.

It is important to keep in mind that the above explanation describes the best case scenario in which all terms have already been translated. For new terminology, translation memory systems provide no help whatsoever, which puts the consistency of an organization's terminology across documents and languages at risk.



Lost Revenue

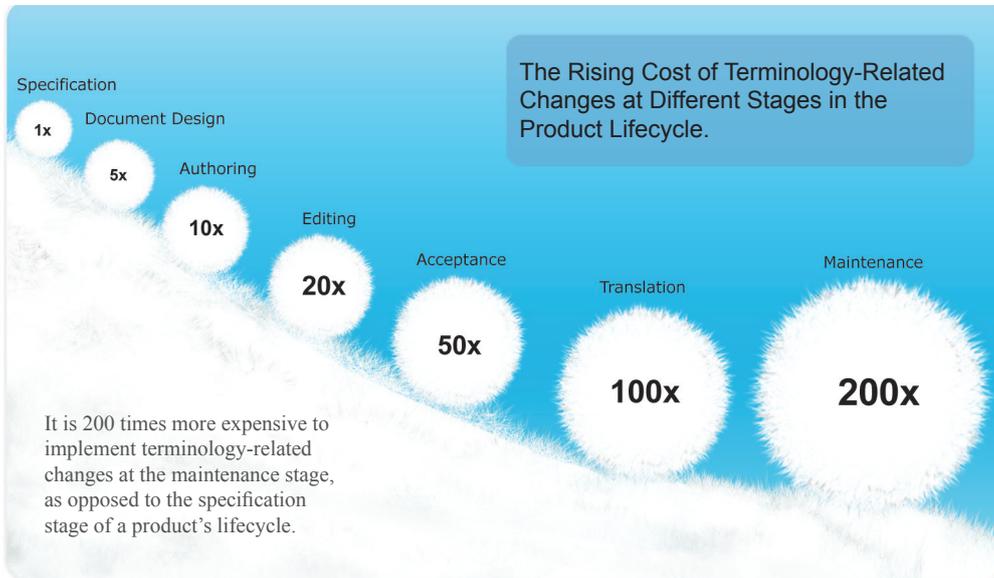
While it's certainly true that managing terminology costs money, not managing terminology can cost substantially more. Consider this simple fact: With project-specific glossaries in place, all project stakeholders, including developers, writers, and translators, utilize only terms that have met with formal approval in their various mediums of communication. Compliance with the corporate lexicon can then be checked with automated consistency tools. Without glossaries, a product—and every document associated with it—must be checked manually for consistency with all other documents. Owing to the complexity of the task, there is a good chance that not every inconsistency will be discovered—after all, unless a super-multilingual someone is hired expressly to read all documents involved in the launch of a product or service, it's rare that any one person has the bandwidth or expertise to catch all inconsistencies. In the off chance that all inconsistencies are identified, fixing them after the fact is an expensive undertaking that can involve re-printing, re-publishing, re-distribution and even product recalls.

The out-of-budget cost of correcting inconsistencies across existing documents is perhaps the least of an organization's worries. Much worse are instances in which a launch has to be postponed because of delays caused by critically inconsistent terminology. It's not uncommon for a product launch in a major international market to be delayed for months on end as a result of translation and terminology issues. These kind of delays can easily result in the loss of millions of dollars of revenue.





The Snowball Effect



Effective terminology management starts long before any writing actually begins. Ideally, an organization's terminology management team should have already decided on the new terms that will depict the features and functions of their latest foreign-bound product in as early as the specification stage of development. Beginning to manage terminology at any point beyond the specification stage—for example, by extracting terms from existing documents and applying them after-the-fact—will, by necessity, require significant changes to all related documentation. Such changes are inevitably expensive and time-consuming: A study conducted in the automobile industry indicates that a change in terminology at the maintenance stage, i.e., after publication, is 200 times more expensive than changes implemented at the product data, or specification stage.

This 200-fold increase in cost only applies to one language. If your organization localizes into say, 50 different languages, then multiplying costs by a factor of 200 must be applied to every single language. This includes the cost of reprinting material, updating websites, potential fines levied, etc., the necessity of which all stems from terminological inconsistency at the source level. It's a true-to-form example of the snowball effect.



A study conducted in the automobile industry indicates that a change in terminology at the maintenance stage is 200 times more expensive than changes incorporated at the product data stage.



International Standards for Terminology Management

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has created a number of standards that outline recognized best practices in terminology management. Some of the more relevant standards include:



ISO 704:2009

Terminology Work – Principles and Methods

This 38-page document is an excellent introductory text to terminology management, including detailed guidelines for writing definitions.



ISO 1087-1:2000

Terminology Work – Vocabulary
Part 1: Theory and Application

This is another overview text that describes the major, high-level concepts behind terminology management.



ISO 12616:2002

Translation – Oriented Terminography

This document provides a wealth of information on managing terminology, with a focus on integration with translation environments.



ISO 12620:2009

Computer Applications in Terminology
– Data Categories

This document specifies the data categories that should be employed to ensure easy data exchange between systems that store and process terminology.

Also, many national standardization bodies, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, publish extensive, domain-specific glossaries that can help kick-start your organization's terminology management strategy.

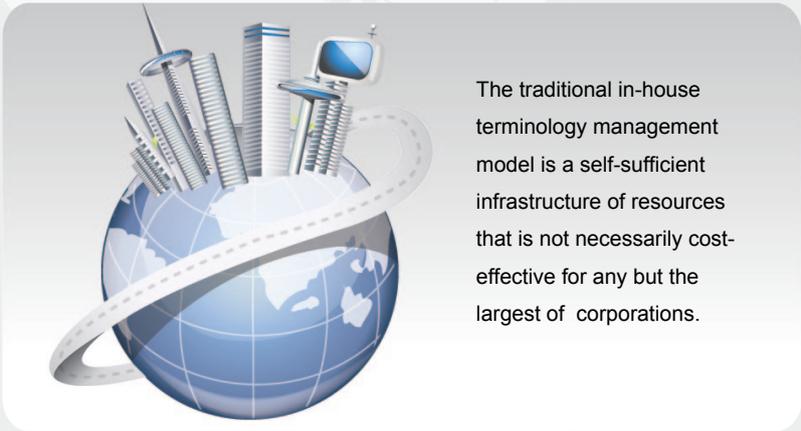


Five Reasons Why You Should Manage Terminology



The In-House Model

A number of large, international organizations have developed their own sophisticated internal methods of managing terminology. Medtronic is a prime example of a highly successful enterprise in the Life Sciences industry that has spent well over a million dollars on terminology management. They have hired dedicated terminologists, developed custom terminology management software, and translate terminology internally to facilitate their overall localization efforts. For multi-national, multibillion-dollar organizations that have an established set of local resources in every market that they serve, this model makes perfect sense.





The Outsourcing Model

For organizations whose globalization efforts are still in a more nascent stage, it makes sense to align themselves with a trusted language service provider that can assist them in the implementation of more involved terminology-related tasks. In an outsourced scenario, the organization sponsoring a terminology management project needs to provide two sets of resources:

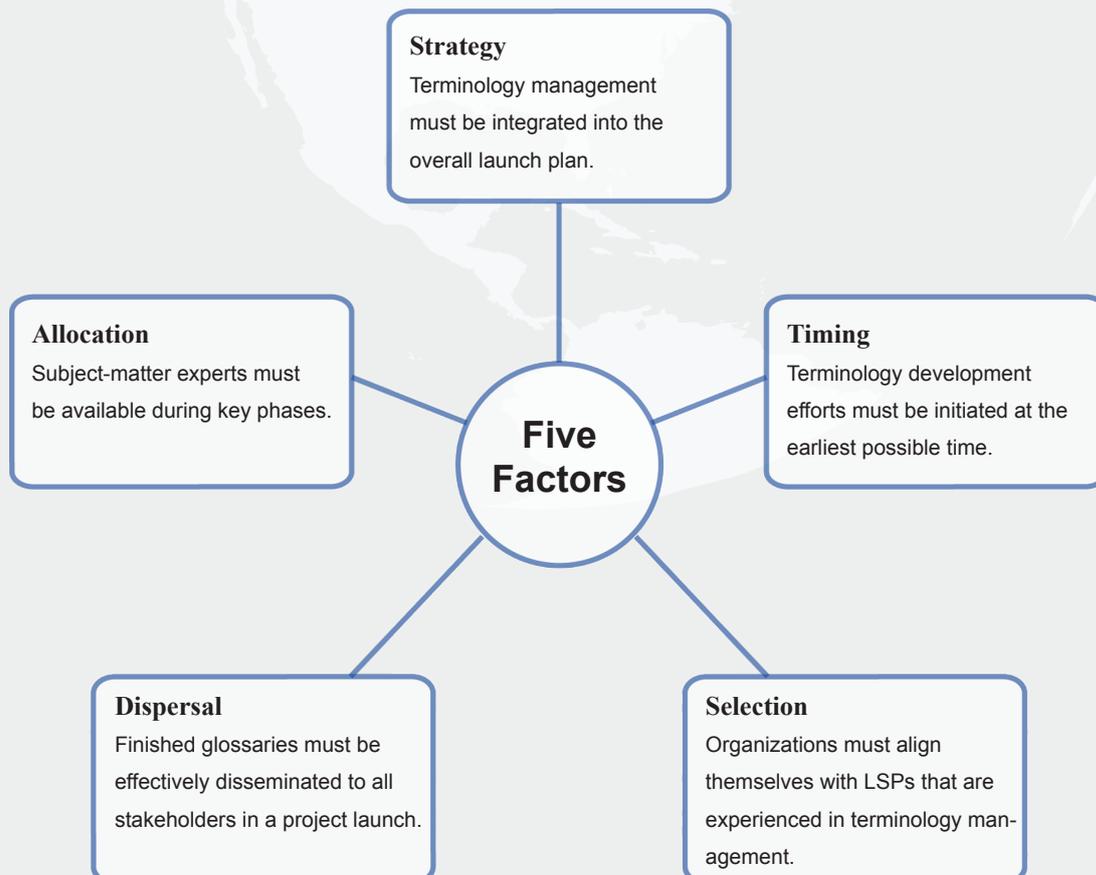
In the development stages of a glossary:

The organization needs to make its subject matter experts available to their localization partner for tasks such as the ranking of synonyms (e.g., preferred, admitted, deprecated, etc.) and the writing and reviewing definitions.

After the glossary is complete:

The organization needs to provide a means for dispersing terminological information to all stakeholders—typically a searchable site on their company intranet.

Aside from selecting the right localization partner, there are five factors that have a profound effect on the success of an outsourced terminology management project.





The New Approach to Terminology Management



Whether your organization employs an in-house or outsourced method of terminology management, the logistics behind maintaining tight control over the consistency of mono- and multilingual content can be messy, depending on the size of your organization and the complexity of your localization projects.

Determining the scope of your terminology management efforts, creating and reviewing glossaries, collaborating on the development of terminological entries, and applying the results to your production workflow as a whole, can collectively become a monumental undertaking. To this, add the fact that most people involved in the terminology management process are generally not in the same office, nor do they have the time to frequently convene in a centralized location to execute the tasks at hand.

There are tools that can help.

TermWiki is a robust terminology management system that can assist you in taking a more organized, powerful approach to the development and ongoing management of your corporate glossary. It is the localization industry's first completely multilingual, wiki-based online terminology management system that operates on an openly-editable, collaborative model.





TermWiki revitalizes the traditional, off-the-shelf approach to terminology management by allowing you to efficiently develop, manage and translate terminology in a structured collaborative environment. It simplifies the traditional approach to terminology management into three practical steps:

✔ **Collaborate**

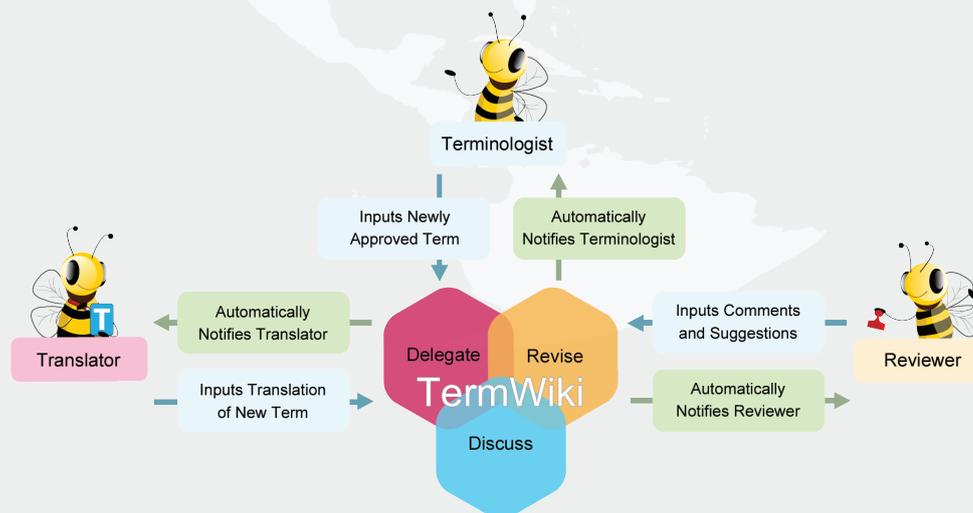
TermWiki is a centralized portal in which terminologists, product managers, technical writers, translators, and reviewers alike can gather remotely and cooperate on the development and maintenance of termbases in real time. In the event that disputes arise regarding the validity of a particular term or definition, TermWiki is designed to host and facilitate a structured discussion to resolve all consistency and translation issues.

✔ **Develop**

TermWiki can be tailored to automatically import and export existing termbases, and it also provides standardized forms for the convenient creation of new multilingual content. By nature of its carefully chosen group of dynamic data categories, TermWiki facilitates the consistency and ISO-compliance of old and new terms alike, thus establishing a platform that enables your corporate glossary to mature with use and become increasingly tailored to your unique workflow and organizational needs.

✔ **Control**

With definable notification functions, automatic history tracking, and robust user profile management features, TermWiki grants you complete control over who sees what content, and how they can interact with it.



Regain Control—On Your Terms.



Definitions



 **glossary**

collection of words that have special meaning in a project

 **synonym**

word that has the same meaning as another word

 **term**

word that has a special meaning in a given subject field

 **termbase**

database that contains a collection of words that have special meaning in a given subject field

 **terminology**

collection of words that have special meaning in a given subject field

 **terminology management system**

software application that enables users to efficiently collect, process, and present terminology

 **translation memory system**

software application that enables translators to reuse previous translations stored in a translation repository



About CSOFT



CSOFT International is a leading provider of multilingual localization, testing and software development services for the worldwide market. Powered by our expert in-country linguistic resources, CSOFT delivers multilingual translation and technological solutions into more than 90 languages. CSOFT services a number of the world's top Fortune 500 companies, and a variety of multinational enterprises across all industries, including Information Technology, Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Financial Services, Chemical and Energy. Employing industry best practices and processes, CSOFT streamlines the translation and localization processes for software, product manuals, online help, marketing collateral and website content, and delivers multilingual publishing in all popular formats.



For more information on CSOFT, please visit www.cssoftintl.com



For more information on TermWiki, check out www.cssoftintl.com/termwiki

About the Author



Uwe Muegge is a director at CSOFT with more than 15 years of experience in the translation and localization industry. Before joining CSOFT, he served as the Corporate Terminologist at Medtronic, the world's largest manufacturer of medical devices and technology. Uwe is currently a member of the technical committee for terminology at the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and teaches graduate courses in Terminology Management at the Monterey Institute.

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