

## Introduction to Risk Assessment Terminology

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Terminology is the discipline that systematically studies concepts and their denominations, that is to say the terms in use in the specialist languages of a science, a technical sector, an occupational activity or a social group in order to *describe or prescribe* its correct use. The term *terminology* not only designates a discipline, but also *the whole of terms which represent a conceptual system in a specific field*. (ISO, 2000).

Twenty years have passed since Ahl *et al.* (1993), in the *Révue Scientifique et Technique* of the then Office International des Epizooties, today's Animal Health World Organization, maintained that because of its continuous and rapid evolution and partly for the fusion of various scientific disciplines the *Nomenclature in risk analysis is in a state of confusion*.

Their call was immediately answered by a FAO/OMS expert mixed Consultation that – on the occasion of the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission of the Alimentarius Codex executive Committee – faced, among other things, the issue of terminology thus acknowledging the necessity of uniform definitions for different terms utilised in *Risk Analysis* (FAO/OMS,1995).

With the publication of *Nomenclature proposée pour l'analyse du risque* in the *Epidémiologie et Santé Animal* journal, and with a view to make the communication easier in the field both of food safety and of importation of animals and their products, some INRA and Maisons-Alfort researchers are getting along with the analysis of the terms utilised in the Risk Analysis field assessing their correspondence with *les expressions anglaises* (Cerf *et al.*, 1996).

Reij *et al.* (2000), in a contribution entitled *Critical Notes on Microbiological Risk Assessment of Food*, reasserted how a major problem with risk assessment is confusion about terminology stressing that many publications quoting the term *Risk Analysis* in the title

have no relevance at all to what is meant by this term by the Alimentarius Codex definitions. The term risk is often confused with the term *probability* and further used with the meaning of *hazard*.

More recently, in a letter to the Editor in the prestigious *Risk Analysis* journal, while analysing the definition differences of the term *risk* between food safety and animal health, areal linguistics Prof. Oliver Cerf has laid the stress on the fact that the terminology problem is, furthermore, at the bottom of possible distortions of risk managers' decision-making processes. (Cerf, 2008).

The sciences analysing and describing risks are relatively new. They are in phase of development just like the terminology associated to them is in phase of evolution (Møller Christensen *et al.*, 2003).

The language utilized in *Risk Analysis* is, without any doubt, a *special language*, a whole of linguistic media (of lexical, morphological, phraseological and syntactic kind) adopted in a conventional and consensual way by a group of individuals working in the same field for the exchange and divulgation of information and knowledges connected to it. This language suits the needs for optimal comprehension at specialist level by giving precision, univocality and concision guarantees.

At the same time it is a language which changes rapidly, if only for the borrowing of *terms* from several disciplines and technologies.

The widening of a discipline knowledge inevitably also brings along the development of the relating special terminology. Novelties need meaningful, univocal and, if possible, clear terms so that it is often essential to create a new term (*i.e.* elicitation) in order to designate a well-defined special concept.

For these reasons the Editorial Board of the Italian Journal of Food Safety decided, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2013, to open a new section of the Journal that, through the collection and explanation of the terms utilized in the field of Risk Analysis (Assessment, Management and Communication), aim the creation of a reasoned term *dictionary* in order to foster and improve the diffusion of literacy as far as the term *risk* is concerned (the new term to be coined might be Risk Literacy paraphrasing the already existing one of Health Literacy). The section is open to contributions of all Authors and manuscripts will be published in English and Italian language; manuscripts will receive high speed revision and publication.

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