WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method implemented by a data processing system for improving the quality of data stored in one or more data stores, including:

retrieving by a hardware storage device datasets from external data sources;

identifying, from the retrieved datasets, items of metadata describing technical attributes that characterize fields in the retrieved datasets;

receiving, from a client device, user-defined names that are candidates for describing the fields in the retrieved datasets;

identifying an association among one or more items of metadata and at least one of the user-defined names;

accessing one or more rules that specify one or more operations, with the one or more operations referencing the at least one of the user-defined names;

for each of one or more of the retrieved datasets,

detecting, in that retrieved dataset, an item of metadata that is assigned to a user-defined name referenced in at least one of the one or more rules;

responsive to detecting, applying the at least one of the one or more rules to one or more data items described by the detected item of metadata; and

following application of the at least one of the one or more rules, storing, in one or more data stores, the one or more data items to which the at least one of the one or more rules are applied.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the items of metadata includes a field name for field of a retrieved dataset.

3. The method of claim 2, further including:

determining a label for the at least one item of metadata, the label representing a semantic meaning for the at least one item of metadata;

identifying a match between the label for the at least one item of metadata and the user-defined name; and

responsive to the match, generating a link between the at least one item of metadata and the item of contextual metadata.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein determining the label includes performing one or more semantic discovery processes on at least one of: the at least one item of metadata, or the data items described by the at least one item of metadata.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the label for the at least one item of metadata is selected from the user-defined names for the data items in the datasets.

6. The method of claim 3, wherein generating the link between the at least one item of metadata and the user-defined name includes generating at least one data structure including data representing the item of metadata and a pointer to data representing the user-defined name.

7. The method of claim 3, wherein generating the link between the at least one item of metadata and the user-defined names includes generating at least one data structure including data representing the user defined name metadata and a pointer to the item of metadata.

8. The method of claim 1, including:

causing display of a graphical user interface at the client device, the graphical user interface including the user-defined names, and an input portion for defining the one or more rules with regard to at least one of the user-defined names; and

receiving data representing an input into the input portion of the graphical user interface, the data defining the one or more rules with regard to the at least one of the user-defined names.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the graphical user interface is configured to display one or more of the items of metadata that are assigned to the user-defined names.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more rules include at least one of a personally identifiable information (PII) rule, or a data quality rule.

11. The method of claim 1, further including detecting, in a retrieved dataset, an item of metadata that is assigned to a user-defined name referenced in at least one of the one or more rules by:

identifying at least one field name included in the retrieved dataset;

comparing the at least one field name with the items of metadata to identify a match between the at least one field name and the item of metadata;

comparing the item of metadata with stored linkage information to identify the user-defined name that is assigned to the item of metadata; and

identifying the at least one of the one or more rules that includes the user-defined name.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the technical attribute includes format and/or structure of the data in the datasets.

13. A hardware storage device for improving the quality of data stored in one or more data stores, the hardware storage device storing instructions that are executable by one or more processing devices to perform the steps of the method of any one of claims 1 to 12.

14. An electronic system for improving the quality of data stored in one or more data stores, including:

one or more processing devices; and

a hardware storage device storing instructions that are executable by the one or more processing devices to perform the steps of the method of any one of claims 1 to 12.