Editorial

Knowledge Organization, Thesauri, and Terminology

The present issue deals only in *one* article with thesauri, yet this contribution - the paper by Winfried SCHMITZ-ESSER ("New Approaches in Thesaurus Application"), read by him in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, at the NISKO'91 Conference and not contained in the Proceedings[1] thereof for having arrived too late - is a programmatic and thought-provoking one. It will undoubtedly be found interesting also by all participants in the workshop on "Thesauri in language technology: Status, Projects, Perspectives" to take place on the day before this year's conference of the German ISKO chapter in Weilburg, Germany, on 15 October 1991 (cf.the pertinent program in ISKO News 6).

Thesauri provide the natural-language access to knowledge - that is their task, a 'classic' one by now. But to what kind of knowledge? On the one hand we have the knowledge of facts and interrelationships as laid down in defmed terms and/or concepts, and on the other hand the knowledge of interrelationships as reflected in thesaurus relations. Knowledge always comes about through statements/propositions/judgments. Any definition is such a judgment, as well as the establishment of e.g. a relation to a super- or subordinated concept, so that all hierarchies can be regarded as definition systems.

Now since in the case of knowledge in the field of information science we are always dealing with specialized knowledge expressed in the special language (Fachsprache) concerned, the transition to the fields of terminology comes as a matter of course. Thus Pavla STANCIKOVA, in the planning of her really excellent NISKO'91 Conference in Bratislava (see also her summary report in this issue's ISKO News 6) displayed sound instinct in linking up knowledge organization *and* terminology with the corresponding organizations ISKO and Infoterm, and by the same token the KOTA (Knowledge Organizatioon and Term Analysis) Group came into being - while being unaware of these developments - in Varna, Bulgaria, and will now hold its KOTA'91 Conference from 16-18 September on this very group of topics.

Here, however, we are confronted with a dilemma: natural language - which a special language[2] undoubtedly is - and terminology are two quite distinct things. For terminology is a controlled language, it works with defined or to-be-defined concepts and their terms, whereas the words of natural language are not necessarily delimited in their understanding and scope, hence not controllable in their use and only little "artificial".

In knowledge organization, however, one can only work with determinable objects and concepts, as was particularly pointed out by Robert FUGMANN in his paper ("Illusory Goals in Information Science Research") read at the 5th ISCCR Conference in June in Toronto. He noted that

all attempts are doomed to failure which aim at satisfactorily computerizing the recognition of meaning in uncontrolled natural language texts, at the selection of the essence from them for storage and at the retrieval of truly and exclusively relevant information from such files, at least as long as these processes continue to be indeterminate ones. This is mainly due to the prevalence of paraphrases for the expression of general concepts and topics and to the unforeseeable wording of these expressions.

Now undoubtedly one must strive to determine a greater and greater number of expressions from a special language to becoming controlled language, composed of defmed terms (actually, this is a tautological expression, as a term is or should always already be a defined word). But in this endeavor one might also think of acquiring a conceptual grasp of the words of the non-special field, hence of everyday, ordinary language. But how can such a thing be done?

At the aforementioned 5th ISCCR'91 an amazing number of papers dealt with thesaurus problems: no fewer than 11 out of a total of 41, hence more than one fourth. Particularly noteworthy was the contribution by Rebecca GREEN ("The expression of syntagmaticrelationships in indexing: Are frame-based index languages the answer?"), which was based on her Ph.D. thesis. By including syntagmatic relations into a thesaurus she found a procedure for establishing frames with which the development of a frame-based index language became possible. Interestingly she conducted her investigations on texts of the New Testament, which are known to contain only few special-language elements. She found that she was able to work adequately with a corpus of "several dozen frames". The application to indexing cases likewise produced very good results.

Thus the doors for continued work on general language, special language, terminology and thesauri are wide open at present for arriving at systems of knowledge organization with which our knowledge can be made better accessible. This I wanted to point out.

As for the rest, two contributions in this issue remind us of the Festschrift Edition 91-2 in honor of Eric de GROLIER, namely the ones by J.M.PERREAULT and B.C.VICKERY's book review of de Grolier's "Big Book". The contribution by H.Peter OHLY deals with a splendid idea to serve the user, which, however, is still in need of very prudent further work on details. And finally, Holger NOHR, with his presentation of the training in Subject/ Content Analysis/Classification/ Indexing at the Hamburg Polytechnic (FHS) furnishes a starting point for a possible expanded discussion, e.g. at the final session of the 2nd ISKO Conference, German Chapter, in Weilburg, Germany, from 15-18 October 1991, already called to your attention in our first paragraph above. For the subject of training in knowledge organization should soon be energetically worked on by an international working group. This was also emphatically demanded at the Business Meeting of the FID/CR Committee during the 5th ISCCR in Toronto.

Ingetraut Dahlberg

1 Availability of these Proceedings through the INDEKS Verlag see the back cover page of Int.Classif.91-2.
2 alias 'technical language', also 'sublanguage', and LSP (Language for Special Purposes).