

BOOK REVIEWS

AITCHISON, Jean (Comp.): **Unesco Thesaurus**. A structured list of descriptors for indexing and retrieving literature in the fields of education, science, social science, culture and communication. Vol. 1: Introduction. Classified Thesaurus. Permuted Index, Hierarchical Display. Vol. 2: Alphabetical Thesaurus. Paris: Unesco 1977. 484+530 p.

This thesaurus was meant to be "the working tool of the Computerized Documentation System of Unesco" for the processing of Unesco documents, Unesco publications, Unesco library acquisitions a.o. It may also be used by anyone whose document coverage is closely related to Unesco's fields of activities. The thesaurus is organized in two volumes and four parts. The approximately 8500 terms listed are arranged in Vol. 1 by subject ("Classified thesaurus") in the following areas:

A General
B/H Science and Technology
J Education
K/S Social Sciences
T/X Humanities and Culture
Y Communication

Z Information, Libraries, Archives

In addition a Permuted Index is given in order to display the context of a term and a Hierarchical Display follows, showing the subordination of each concept. The two latter aids for access list just the terms without their references to the Classified thesaurus with its notations. Vol. 2 contains the Alphabetical thesaurus with the concept notations as well as with the indication of concept relationships BT, NT RT and – as a novum – TT for "Top Term in the hierarchical display". Terminology control is accomplished in the alphabetical thesaurus by Used For (UF) and USE instructions, eventually one also finds an SN (Scope Note) in case it is deemed necessary.

The organization of the concepts within one of the areas is by fields and subfields, the latter are subdivided into facets. Thus "political science" is faceted in the following way:

L Political Science
L03 Political history
L05 Political development
L06/19 Political philosophy
L08/17 Political theory
L20/59 State
L22/31 Political Systems
L32 Constitutional Law
L34 Administrative Law
L35/49 Government
L50/55 State Security
L56/59 Law enforcement
L60/79 Internal politics
L80/99 International politics

This example shows also the alphanumeric and expansion-permitting notation. Notations have been developed according to the concept system for four levels of abstraction, as will be seen in the following example:

L60/79 Internal politics
L74 Oppression
L74.80 Resistance to oppression
L74.80.20 Passive resistance

If eventually a further breakdown is needed, letters are added which sometimes bear a mnemonic feature, as e.g.:

Z50.05.30U (for) Universal Decimal Classification
This adding of letter has, however, also been foreseen for higher levels of abstraction as in

Z56.60P (for) Precision Ratio
Z56.60R (for) Recall Ratio

A very helpful feature must be mentioned: many of the classes are introduced by mentioning the 'characteristic of division' in brackets. This clarifies the system's structure and contents and facilitates its use. I have never seen this so consistently applied. It should become a common feature of all classification systems!

In the introduction to this thesaurus the sources for the terms which have been consulted for the proper presentation of the different subject areas and fields are given. It is said that the Broad System of Ordering (BSO) in its 2nd revised draft edition of 1976 was also considered, its 3500 new terms enriched the previous collection for a Unesco Thesaurus up to 8500. Here we would like to ask: is it correct to exploit other systems in such a way as to make them practically superfluous? Also considered were the Bliss Classification, the UDC and the SPINES Thesaurus. Besides these general systems some 29 other schemes were used and many subject experts have been consulted.

The result could almost be called a universal faceted classification system with a thesaurus-like index and two other access instruments. Jean Aitchison again demonstrated that improvements in the area of classification systems design are possible – her Thesaufacet of 1968 had been a model classification system and thesaurus for quite some time.

Besides this she proved – what has been denied quite often in our times – that a single person with the help of experts and other systems is still able to bring the almost entire number of knowledge fields into a consistent presentational form. The workload must have been enormous but her willpower to overcome it is simply admirable. It is to be wished that the users of this thesaurus – or should one rather say 'classaurus' as Ganesh Bhattacharyya would call such a combination between a classification system and a thesaurus – may find it comprehensive and as much detailed as they need it. At least the librarians and information scientists should be content with their field: they will find a suitable faceted classification system arranged on pp. 265–292. This, however, is the big exception.

Compared with the BSO the new Unesco Thesaurus seems to have had a better support both from the intellectual as well as from the practical side. The typography in all the 4 parts is splendidly chosen, easy to overview, using lots of space, bold face, italics etc. somewhat similar to the excellent typography of the Dewey Decimal Classification. The survey over each subject area is always printed ahead of the section in bold face for a first orientation.

Except for the notation which seems to be too clumsy and hard to memorize and except for the contents of fields beyond my own knowledge I would like to say: here is the new model thesaurus for future guidance!

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