

Book Reviews

Edited by Clément Arsenault

Book Review Editor

BROUGHTON, Vanda. *Essential Thesaurus Construction*. London: Facet, 2006. viii, 296 p. ISBN-13: 978-1-85604-565-0 (pb).

Thesauri, strictly speaking, information-retrieval thesauri (distinguished from literary thesauri of PM Roget and its derivates), are tools for knowledge organization which subsume and display many classificatory relations. Formally defined, it is a controlled but dynamic vocabulary of semantically and generically related terms. It can be gainfully employed by any information worker in institutions such as libraries, information centers, archives, museums and art galleries for indexing text and non text media. There are numerous thesauri to serve different subject needs and levels of detail that can be used effectively for organizing and retrieving electronic information. Thesaurus construction involves much personal judgment in the selection and analysis of terms. Categorization is much more than slot-fitting. There are software packages to build a thesaurus from scratch using text analysis and other computational techniques, but these are as costly as they are often unreliable. Intellectual facet analysis is still unrivaled.

This book, comprising twenty chapters and very valuable end matter, can be divided into three parts: 1) General introduction to thesaurus (definitions and functions); 2) Principles of vocabulary control; and 3) Methodology for thesaurus construction and maintenance. The main focus of the book is on principles and practice of thesaurus construction with emphasis on the latter as out-rightly declared by the author.

Chapters cover the following topics: What is a thesaurus, Tools for subject access and retrieval, Uses of thesauri, Why use a thesaurus, Types of thesaurus, Formats of thesaurus, Building a thesaurus, and Management and maintenance (including software used thereto). In between, the author discusses topics such as Vocabulary control and Thesaural relations. The text in each chapter has been fragmented into small but aptly labeled sections. Each section has its own itemized and boxed summary in the form of working tips. Thus each chapter has many summaries

to facilitate comprehension. Summaries, tables, charts and figures add value and clarity, and enhance the reference convenience of this textbook. Presentation is simply excellent.

Six appendices demonstrate the construction of a thesaurus ("thesauro-facet") in Veterinary science and Animal welfare based on real titles sampled from a database (Appendix 1). In Appendix 2 the key terms, about 500, are extracted from the titles and arranged alphabetically. In Appendix 3, the terms are analyzed into the following categories: Agents, Form of Document, Operation/Action, Parts and Properties, Place and Time, Processes and Products. Two more abstract categories, namely Theory and Philosophy, and Phase Relations, have also been added as required by the local situation. Appendix 4 shows these categories and their concepts (isolates) arranged in logical citation order from general to special. The author, inevitably, adheres to the Classification Research Group citation order, which recognizes twelve facets. Appendix 5 provides a complete systematic display of the terms along with alphabetical notation of the concepts. Appendix 6 consists of the entries as they would appear in the final product: alphabetical order depicting NT/BT/RT relations along with notation, thus making a complete thesaurus. One could not have found a better practical yet concise course on thesaurus construction.

It is a brief, simple and clear manual, which will come handy to all learners of this art. It is eminently suited to teach the designing of a controlled and structured vocabulary. An outstanding feature is a glossary of over 170 terms explained simply and concisely. The text and the glossary are interlinked typographically. The present mid-career generation of indexers has learnt this art from the well entrenched *Thesaurus Construction and Use* by Aitchison, Gilchrist and Bawdin (now in its 4th edition, 2000). Though the book under review and its author Ms. Broughton owe much to this enduring and pervasive work, yet it has much to offer to the new generation. The book is well-structured, clear and logical notwithstanding minor lapses and omissions. For exam-

ple, nowhere are the international thesaural symbols defined in ISO 2788 (such as < (BT), > (NT), – (RT), →/= (USE/UF), etc.) mentioned. These are minor lapses in face of the many outstanding features of this book. It is heartily recommended to all instructors in the field and to a wide range of indexers.

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Theory, Culture & Society, vol. 23 (2/3), May 2006, p. 1–50.

1. Introduction

Classification is of interest to many disciplines. It is a fascinating phenomenon, though it might not be obvious to researchers in classification theory and knowledge organization with our intimate association meetings, however many groups are interested in it. For everyone who comes to it, classification is a profoundly abstract and complex process, riddled with problems of contradictions, universality, semantics, and provincialism – heady and important topics for social science. In the first 50 pages of the May 2006 issue of *Theory, Culture & Society*, a journal of cultural sociology, theory, and interdisciplinary social science (Sage 2006) – the contributors address questions of definition and scope of classification. This is only part of a larger 616-page project called the New Encyclopedia project. I have been asked to review these first 50 pages.

The structure of this review is as follows. First I will briefly outline the structure of the first 50 pages of this issue of *Theory, Culture & Society* (TCS). I will next talk about the discourse used to address problems of classification in this issue. Then I will make an analysis of some of the key concerns outlined in TCS and compare it to some key concerns I see present in Knowledge Organization research. I will then close with an assessment of what the readers of *Knowledge Organization* could take away from the project and discourse outlined in TCS.

2. Structure

The contents of this issue run as follows:

- Mike Featherstone and Couze Venn, Editor and Review Editor respectively, “Problematizing Glo-

bal Knowledge and the New Encyclopedia Project,” pp. 1–20;

- Roy Boyne, Notes and Commentary Editor, “Classification,” pp. 21–30;
- John Dupré, not affiliated with the journal, “Scientific Classification,” pp. 30–32;
- Luciana Parisi, not affiliated with the journal, “Generative Classification,” pp. 32–35;
- Couze Venn, Review Editor, “The Collection,” pp. 35–40;
- Mark Donohue, not affiliated with the journal, “Classification and Human Language,” pp. 40–42;
- Derek Robbins, not affiliated with the journal, “Classification in French Social Theory,” pp. 42–44;
- Couze Venn, Review Editor, “Rubbish, the Remnant, Etcetera,” pp. 44–46; and,
- Maria Esther Maciel, not affiliated with the journal, “The Unclassifiable,” pp. 46–50.

3. Discourse

Overall, this issue provides a novel look at classification – one that not every Knowledge Organization researcher would take. Insight into the human propensity to classify is described here. Classification is an apparatus of social division, aesthetics, identity, and resistance. The literature used to support this exploration of classification is not a literature of Knowledge Organization, but rather a literature of social theory. And though Knowledge Organization may not consider them core, they are not unfamiliar authors: Foucault, Borges, Plato, Descartes, Lévi-Strauss, Durkheim, Mauss, Heidegger, Putnam, Deleuze, Darwin, Habermas, Lyotard, Barthes, and Eco.

These references to the arts and philosophy, demonstrate the conceptual geography of this journal, and this issue. It is not concerned with the evaluation or design of classification systems – at least not in the same way Knowledge Organization would consider. Rather, the authors here are engaged in the creation of constructs in order to interpret social life. This issue explores constructs in classification. And the work presented in TCS aims to help us see aspects of classification relevant to our society, through these constructs. Some of these constructs we assume in order to do our work in Knowledge Organization. Others we do not.

The first article is an introduction to the whole 616-page work. As such it is a general interpretive essay on the nature of global knowledge, and it outlines the New Encyclopedia Project. This Project is designed to question how globalization affects theo-