EDITORIAL

Classification and the Social Sciences

The contributions of F. Riggs and P. Vasarhelyi in the I.C. issues of 1979-3 and 1980-1 respectively recommended already possible solutions for the most difficult situation of concept analysis and terminological clarification in the subjective oriented world of concepts of the social sciences. In this issue three of the papers are included which were discussed at a recent meeting of the Unesco Division for the International Development of the Social Sciences in Paris, June 9–11, 1980, aiming at the development of an integrated thesaurus of the social sciences. J. Litoukhin from the said Unesco Division set the theme: "to develop a BSO for the social sciences" and delivered the encouraging introductory paper. J. Meyriat demonstrated on the basis of a rather large quantitative analysis of some 60 existing thesauri and classification schemes in the social sciences to what extent such an integrated thesaurus might grow and I was asked to investigate whether the Broad System of Ordering (BSO) of the FID could provide the structural framework for such an integrated system. Two further papers provided additional information, namely on similar undertakings in an attempt at establishing compatibility between the MISON Rubricator, the UDC and the BSO (M. Palnicov) and on a bibliography of the existing mono- and multilingual dictionaries and thesauri in the social sciences (M. Krommer-Benz). The latter two could not be included in this issue for reasons of space, but see the report on this meeting on p. 86. The question was posed, is it correct and necessary to work towards establishing such a BSO for the social sciences? Who would be the user of such a system? Would it provide the survey and the easy utilization for all those who ask for it? Would it be possible to agree on a conceptual framework in order that every single concept would find its orderly position in such a system? Would such a BSO for the social sciences become the compatibility instrument necessary for subject indexing in large cooperative information systems? All of these questions cannot be answered today as yet, since there are two problems at least to solve in advance: (1) the problem of the actual term coverage of the thesauri in question and (2) the problem of concept organization in the social sciences. In order to solve problem (1) a descriptor bank of all the existing thesauri in the social sciences should be established from which the terminological and conceptual overlap can be measured and from which the differences in relationship indications of the terms included could be recognized. In order to solve problem (2) investigations into the principles of concept organization in general become necessary as well as into their applicability in the social sciences.

So far, thesauri were developed according to somebody's need and mostly in relation to a certain information system and its goals; one could say, thesauri grew rather wildly without a preconceived plan, almost like society itself. Although this observation holds true for all subject fields, it finds its special applicability in the social sciences. Should one not aim at controlling this thesaurus abundance soon and create on the basis of a thorough facet analysis of all the social science fields a well-ordered garden of terms where the plants belonging together may be found together and where no nasty weeds disturb a fast and direct access?

Should we not ask ourselves what will happen if we would not try to reestablish order in the apparent thesaurus wilderness of today? A very shocking example of a thesaurus development can be seen in the INIS Thesaurus with its continuous updatings every 6 months; soon it will reach its 20th edition! Who will be able to keep up with such an uneconomic procedure? It is not the new terms coming up here and there that demand the updating; they are a minority against those terms that denote existing concepts which have not as yet been considered necessary for a given system. Sooner or later every information system tends to cover the whole of knowledge since every field of knowledge interrelates with many other fields and thus uses also the concepts of these other fields.

There will be a chance for many of you to join in the discussions on these topics at an international conference to be held in Bielefeld, May 1981. (See also, p. 83 of this issue on the CONTA Conference). The main speakers will be E. K. Scheuch, H. Teune, J. S. Petöfi, J. Meyriat, F. W. Riggs, J. Aitchison, D. Soergel and G. Rosza!

Starting with this edition, I.C. will include a new Newsletter, namely COCTA News; a hearty welcome to all COCTA Members! This newsletter replaces the Termdok Bulletin which had to be discontinued after its author left the TNC, the Swedish Terminology Center. From 1981 on I.C. will also include the FID/CR Newsletter.

And something else will change in 1981: for a number of reasons, above all in order to keep the prices stabilized for our readers, I.C. will change its publishing house and will appear in our newly founded INDEKS Verlag.

In order to secure appropriate delivery of I.C., please be so kind to reconfirm your delivery address with our following address: INDEKS Verlag, Woogstr. 36a, D-6000 Frankfurt 50, Fed. Rep. of Germany.

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