EDITORIAL

Integration and Classification

Only in the last 20 years have we experienced the declining usefulness of the existing universal classification systems for the organization of the abundance of single facts and topics. Consequently, like mushrooms in fertile soil after a warm rain, language and concept-oriented thesauri have sprung up to describe document contents more precisely. However, since these depend on the collection of documents to which they refer, they have to be maintained and their growth has to be observed carefully. This development has not only taken place in documentation centers, but in libraries as well, with the trend away from systematic catalogues toward alphabetical subject headings catalogues in card form or as printed lists. With this development an enormous splitting of interests occurred on the one hand, because everyone was concerned with his own problems of subject description and the special terminology of his field with its adequate relationship to the documents to be described. On the other hand this led to a positive development – a new consciousness of a more adequate and, possibly, a more predictable representation of subject content on levels of abstraction accessible to users of a system through their own terms and their own concepts. This development also made evident the necessity of defining terms and their concepts and of considering, identifying and representing conceptual relationships within the vocabulary of a subject field.

Now, the tide seems to be flowing in the other direction. There is increasing interest in cooperation between certain centers and systems. Thus, storage-dependent subject- and mission-oriented thesauri become a hindrance for collaboration. This situation has already led to investigations about the scope of thesauri, their structure and contents, and has raised the question of how thesauri of one and the same subject field or of closely related fields could be made compatible or united to form a whole, a process which one could certainly call 'integration' of thesauri.

In this light, one of the results of thesaurus development as mentioned above – namely the promotion of a new consciousness about the necessity of defining concepts and the knowledge and skill in distinguishing conceptual relationships – will receive utmost significance.

The definitions of 'integration' as given in Webster's 3rd Dictionary (I will cite only three of the eleven listed):

(1) the condition of being formed into a whole by the addition or combination of parts or elements
(2) the combination and coordination of separate and diverse elements or units into a more complete and harmonious whole
(3) the sum of the processes by which the developing parts of an organism are formed into a functional and structural whole

show that we must be very familiar with the parts and elements of each of the thesauri under comparison and also with the set of relationships of each of these elements when we want to compare and fit them into a "functional and structural", "complete and harmonious whole".

In June 1980, the UNESCO Division of International Development of Social Sciences convened a meeting aiming at the development of an integrated thesaurus of the social sciences (see also the Editorial of IC 1980-2 and the three papers of this meeting printed in that issue). There it became obvious that clear guidelines had to be developed on how one should proceed in comparing thesauri and in establishing compatibility between their elements. Consequently, such guidelines were elaborated and the results are available now for testing and their possible improvement.

In this issue you will find something like a continuation of IC 1980-2, partly through papers presented at the CONTA Conference (see the short report on this conference in the COCTA News of this issue). At the University of Manchester (UMIST) a study was undertaken under the guidance of Prof. J. Sager toward establishment of compatibility between thesauri. The material, which exists so far only in manuscript form, will be published in three parts in the forthcoming issues of IC. In this issue we start with the preliminary investigation completed by a collaborator of Prof. Sager, Mr. Somers, summarizing observations made in comparing the existing international thesaurus standards and guidelines as a possible source for similarities and divergences between thesauri. In addition, the papers of the CONTA Conference by J. Aitchison ("Integration of Thesauri in the Social Sciences") and I. Dahlberg ("Guidelines for the Establishment of Compatibility Between Information Languages") have been included in this issue. Two more papers from the conference would have been of interest to our readers, namely D. Soergel's ("Compatibility of Vocabularies") and M. Dienes' ("Testing the Compatibility Matrix in the Field of Culture") but unfortunately lack of space prevents their inclusion. The latter investigation was a test of the guidelines paper mentioned above. All the papers of this conference will be printed in the CONTA proceedings volume intended to appear before the end of 1981.

This topic of compatibility and integration of information languages will also be treated at the 4th International Study Conference on Classification Research in Augsburg, Federal Republic of Germany, June 29-July 2, 1981. (See the Call for Papers on the inside of the back cover). It would be useful if further tests of the kind Mrs. Dienes has done in the field of culture could be undertaken.

Let us be aware that we can improve our field indeed if we would look closer into each other's information languages and if we learn to compare and draw conclusions from these comparisons. By studying the different thesauri and classification systems, we become aware of the insights of our colleagues and perceive the superiorities of one system over the other. The different possibilities of thesaurus construction with respect to contents, structure and display become obvious. Could this not lead us to a better understanding of each other? It certainly would help though, to prepare the ground for the necessary future work of integration in classification.

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