

Thesauri in Libraries
February 28th, 2022

Thesauri in Libraries

- How CV and Thesauri commonly appear in libraries
 - Focus on the semantics of the system: the meaning of the system, and what we should include

Thesauri

- We encounter quite often in print materials, e-Books, article databases
 - These databases will allow author-applied keywords
 - But, the value added to these databases are that experts go through to prescribe keywords that are suitable for the article and database - these are the thesauri and CV work

Aboutness

- The property of a word
- How well a word indicates its subject matter
- "the relation between a word and its subject matter"
 - Sometimes expressed as a quality of words - how well they indicate a subject
 - Varying levels of "aboutness" of words

Principle of Aboutness

- How can we systematically, predicably connect a word to its concept?
- Evidence/Warrant
 - Describes valid types of evidence
 - Help determine the right word for a concept (preferred terms)
 - Help determine what words are equivalent in meaning (lead-in terms)
 - Help determine how words are related (BT and NT)
 - Most common types of warrant
 - Literary warrant
 - Oldest type
 - Uses the literature as a valid source of terminology
 - Literature is either collection itself, or vast universe of books on the subject
 - Literature is authoritative source
 - Determine not only terms used, but also level of specificity for different subjects
 - Ideally, presents in its own literary voice
 - Not inventing terms, but extracting words from texts, neighbouring texts, or discourse itself
 - Scientific warrant/Consensus warrant
 - Uses experts to define valid terminology
 - People are authoritative source
 - Late 19th, early 20th century - Enlightenment approach
 - Might attempt to create a system that describes reality itself

- Usually makes collection conform to agreed upon terms within a community of experts
 - Ideally, reflects fields of knowledge accurately
 - By learning logic of system, will also learn logic of scientific community
- User warrant
 - Dominant way to describe part of thesauri since 1980s
 - Uses users as source of valid terminology
 - Get to minds of users and terminology they expect to use, to direct themselves to the resources in collection
 - Lots of possible terms could be derived from passive collection (i.e., search logs)
 - Or could be assembled from direct user research (i.e., interviews, surveys)
 - Most powerful for creating exhaustive lead-in terms
 - Usually creates an intuitive system that uses user's natural language
- Ethical warrant
 - Unlike previous forms of warrant, less a source of terms rather than a test of the validity of the system
 - Considers the religious, racial, gender, cultural, and language representations of a system
 - Removing slurs and correcting for bias
 - Counters user or literary warrant - if it is creating harm to the people connected to the term, then ethical warrant calls for the revision of term
- Epistemology
- Obsolescence
- Tools for evaluation of word to concept change throughout time, meanings change throughout time
 - Stable relationship between a term and a concept is impossible
 - But we wouldn't create large and complex CV and thesauri if we didn't think it would aid searchers over decades
 - Must predict that this word will be predicable for a while

Library of Congress Subject Headings

Key features

- It's very old
- In nearly every English book you come across
- Not quite a thesaurus
 - A post coordination system
- Has sub-divisions
- Set process for how to propose revisions to terminology

Common Types of Sub-Divisions for LCSH

- By geography
- By chronology

- By forms
- By other types of topics
- Multiple subdivisions

- Specialized type of cataloguing

Hierarchies of LCSH

- Can be difficult to organize Subject Headings in a consistent matter
- Logic can break down due to how big it is, and history of LCSH itself (lack of logical requirements in early stages)

Growth and Change in LCSH

- If you want to propose new terms:
 - Happens through Cataloguing in-Publication

In-Class Session

- Wiki set up for the course
 - Share notes from the course
 - Can go into your Portfolio at end of course
 - Able to educate others and take care with the topics
 - Dr. Bullard will post the link to the wiki soon

The "Time Travel" Problem

- Dr. Bullard is recording next week's videos and designing next week's content this week
 - Asking for clarification, specificity when asking questions

Review of Lectures

- Warrant was the big topic of this week, under Thesauri in Libraries
 - Literary
 - Scientific
 - User
 - Extremely broad type of warrant; also, extremely difficult
 - What we want to do: read people's minds to understand the types of search terms and tools they use
 - E.g., figuring out what vocabulary the entire Vancouver population uses
 - Idea that there is one single vocabulary being used by a demographic is usually faulty
 - Deliberately trying to create several different user personas for this demographic
 - Ethical
- Library of Congress Subject Headings
 - Continues to be frustrating and illuminating case study of how library vocabulary works
 - Making local changes
 - Often involves making changes that are not compatible with the LCSH system
 - However, making local arrangements to overwrite these changes are extremely difficult
 - Technologies

- Preprogrammed LCSH
 - In a field that gets overwritten on a daily weekly monthly basis
- Problem for libraries: do we stick with LCSH or retain local changes
- Cataloguing and Classification course at UBC - goes into detail about how-tos
- Aboutness
 - If a term is doing a good job of referring to a concept
 - The content of a resource
 - Counterpart to aboutness: isness
 - "This IS a work of poetry," "this IS a photograph of nature," whereas aboutness is "this work is ABOUT poetry," "this photo is ABOUT nature"

Weekly Assignment

- Where else to track down Controlled Vocabularies (CVs)?
 - LCSH:
 - Genre and Form thesaurus
 - "Poetry," "photo"
 - Demographic and Group Term thesaurus
 - Relatively new; "this person is Canadian, a woman, etc."
 - Anytime there is a drop-down list on a web forum
 - List of countries or languages for web development CVs
 - Feminist thesaurus from 1970s
 - Homosaurus
 - Localized Indigenous-Centered CVs
 - Marks field 650
 - 650_7,1,2,3
 - Look at Mark view in Catalogue
 - Can email Dr. Bullard or Bri about LCSH subject headings, to confirm if they are LCSH

Activity

- Information architecture
- Division of what was in stacks is the most meaningful takeaway from exercises like this
- Card sorting activity:
 - Actual physical materiality of system you are working with shapes the system and leads to specific ways of thinking