Discussion 5: Thesaurus Evaluation

LIBR 247-10

Examine a multilingual thesaurus linked from the Thesauri and Subject Heading Lists, or other multilingual thesaurus you can access. Consider the issues in constructing a multilingual thesaurus as addressed in Hudon's article, and the functions and uses of multilingual thesauri in facilitating search and browse.

Your initial response should be 400-500 words. Please post your initial response by end of Thursday. Please also read your classmates' postings and post one or more peer response by end of this week.

There is a rubric to communicate the expectations of discussion topics. To see the rubric, click the gear icon at the upper right of the discussion area, as shown below.

College of Applied Sciences and Arts has introduced as a requirement that every student who graduates should have an international experience. As we are a 100% online program our students can meet the requirement virtually by means of class assignments, virtual projects/internships. Students will prove that they have met it via Competency O (Links to an external site.)—contribute to the cultural, economic, educational, and social well-being of our global communities—in their e-Portfolio. This change only applies to students who enter the School from Spring 2015 onwards. This assignment includes an international component to help you think broadly and build evidence for your e-Portfolio.

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A great deal of stress was placed on the need for all represented languages in a multilingual thesaurus to be treated equally. Hudon M. argued that a multilingual thesaurus where the structures are allowed to differ will more likely reflect the languages and cultures that they represent, but doing so seems to be the equivalent of comparing apples and oranges. While not entirely inevitable, having two different structures in a multilingual thesaurus would likely result in unequal treatment of those two represented languages.

In the historical development of the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology, the publication of the first two editions was in English and then subsequently translated into Spanish (for the first edition by the Latin American Information Center on Migration (CIMAL) and the second edition by International Organization for Migration (IOM)) and French (by Documentation Réfugiés in Paris for both editions.). The second edition was translated into Russian. This draws into question of whether the four languages are treated equally or if English is the dominant language of the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology.

As I only speak English it was difficult for me to ascertain whether this thesaurus treats the languages of English, Spanish, French, and Russian equally that would result in equal retrieval of the relevant information regardless of the language of the user. What I could ascertain through my modest search through the thesaurus was that the searchability of the thesaurus in each language was equally accessible with (to the best of my knowledge) identical structures. I did notice that English equivalents were tagged with the flag of the United Kingdom. This suggested that the thesaurus used British English. The few words that I know that have variations between American English and British English were not included in the thesaurus and I was unable to ascertain which version of English is used in the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology. The Spanish equivalents were tagged with a Spanish flag suggesting that European Spanish was used. While I have forgotten most of my unused Spanish from Spanish courses I took in high school, I do remember that the professor emphasized that there were difference between the Spanish spoken in Latin America and the Spanish spoken in Spain. I have never possessed a sufficient degree of fluency to make the determination on which Spanish dialect the thesaurus currently follows, but I do note that the original Spanish translation of the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology was done by the Latin American Information Center on Migration (CIMAL) headquartered in Chile which suggested that the thesaurus probably uses a Latin American Spanish dialect.

One of the items that Hudon M. argued was that the scarcity of software for adequate development served as a barrier to the construction of multilingual thesauri. After two printed editions of the thesaurus in 1986 and 1996, the thesaurus underwent a transition to an electronic database. Since late 2001, the thesaurus has been maintained through AIRS (Advanced Information Retrieval System) from Digitech, France. The system seems to serve The UN Refugee Agency adequately. It is noticeable that even though the second edition of the thesaurus was translated into Russian, that the Russian version is not available through the website.

References

About the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology. Retrieved from http://www.refugeethesaurus.org/content.php/about?expand=6

Hudon, M. (1997) Multilingual thesaurus construction-integrating the views of different cultures in one gateway to knowledge and concepts. *Information Services & Use* 17(2/3)