

LIS 530 - ASSIGNMENT 3
THESAURUS EVALUATION

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I was using the online edition/version of the INSPEC Thesaurus for this assignment. (Except for question number six which is about APAIS.)

1. Source of terminology

There was no information available about the source of terminology in the sample PDF file or the online version. First I suspected that literary warrant is a main source of terminology. I tested 3 terms from the thesaurus and for each I checked two of the documents found. Most of them had the exact same phrase I used from the thesaurus. Thus I concluded that it is using at least literary warrant. However I found a few, where the term I searched for ("atomic beam magnetic resonance") did not appear in the text or the abstract. Not being a subject expert in this field I do not have the expertise to decide whether user, cultural, structural, or scholarly warrant was used in this case or in the CV. But I suspect the last may have been used in this case, because INSPEC is a scholarly database, possible used mostly by scholars.

2. Specificity of terminology

There are at least five levels of hierarchy in this thesaurus. For example when looking at the term "sewage treatment" one can see the broader term (BT) "waste handling", which in turn has a the BT "waste management." The chain of BTs goes up to "environmental management," then "management." The five level of hierarchy of terms allows rather high level of specificity. It is also possible that there are even more levels, this was just one somewhat random example.

However, even I as a lay person can imagine that there are several sewage treatment methods and these narrower terms are not listed in this controlled vocabulary. Therefore the specificity is not at the highest possible level. The sample file explained that INSPEC is using the "most specific term appropriate to the subject of the document." Therefore when an end user using the thesaurus they should select the appropriate level of term, but going up or down in the hierarchy. And the indexers should also comply with this principle if indexing the documents at the appropriate level of VC terms.

3. Semantic relationships shown

Hierarchical relationships were shown at all the terms I looked at. I already mentioned the broader terms at the previous point. The narrower terms (NT) were also shown. One could click down on the tree of terms to reach the lowest one.

"Top terms" (TT) in INSPEC's terminology "are the highest or most general terms in the hierarchy." In other words if one would keep clicking on the chain of BT at the last step would reach the TT. For easy of use INSPEC included it for all terms that had at least one. Some had more than one, e.g. "global warming" belongs to both to the "environmental factors" and to the "planetary atmospheres" TTs. This could be considered a polihierarchy. TT (like BT and NT) belongs to the family of hierarchical relationships, but visually they were represented differently: they show up right under the main term on the screen, while the NTs and BTs were arranged vertically little bit further down.

Related terms (RT) were also shown, and the list was also arranged vertically, similarly to NTs and BTs. For example "global warming" was a related term (RT) of "environmental management."

Another relationship that was shown was "Prior Terms" (PT). For example "air pollution" is a prior term of "global warming." I presume as the technical language is changes

over time it is important to find pertinent documents using either the older or the newer terminology referring to the same things.

Lead-in terms are also present, showing equivalency relationships. They are indicated in italics. For example "atomic lasers" is a lead-in term for "atom lasers." Viewing the "atom lasers" record one can see under "used for" heading all lead-in terms, including "atomic lasers" and "single atom lasers."

4. Term syntax and semantics

The online version of INSPEC has direct entries as opposed to indirect. For example from my answer of the first point above "sewage treatment" is a direct entry. It appears as is instead of showing "management - environmental management - waste management - waste handling-sewage treatment."

They are also direct entries in the other meanings of the word "direct" as it relates to CVs. The words of the term appear in natural language order, e.g. "sewage treatment" instead of "treatment, sewage."

The plural form of nouns is used as opposed to the singulars. For example searching for "lens" one gets a list of possible terms. The first of the recommended choices is "lenses."

Terms that need further disambiguation are marked with "*". For example searching for "Dispersion" we can find "Dispersion (waves)," where the "waves" qualifier in parenthesis specifies the meaning of Dispersion.

5. Pre-coordination vs. post-coordination of terms

INSPEC is using post-coordination. I concluded to this, because I haven't found a single term that would have conjunction, preposition of subdivisions. I admit that besides spending 15 minutes checking for possible pre-coordinated terms I also looked through the sample PDF pages for clues. I didn't find any pre-coordinated terms there either.

6. Creation of terms: synthetic vs. enumerative (of APAIS)

This thesaurus does not allow synthesis, all the terms are listed, and there are no facet tables present. From these three observations I concluded that the method used for creating terms is enumerative. For example searching for "sociology of religion" (or for "sociology religion" results only in either sociology or religion related terms. Also, when browsing the CV the Sociology heading does not list Religion under narrower or related term. Same applies the other way around.

However I noticed that "urban sociology" is an NT (narrower term) for Sociology. This could suggest that APAIS is a synthetic. But there were no other branches of Sociology listed, therefore it is not synthetic.

(P.s. I was a double major as an undergraduate in Sociology and Religious Studies. Hence my interest in these areas.)

7. Other noteworthy features (of INSPEC)

Some entries have scope notes. This is designated with an "i" icon, standing for "information. For example acoustic analysis' scope notes says that it is "used for measurements of physical properties of gases, liquids and solids by acoustic methods."

I did not find information whether this thesaurus is open or closed. I.e. whether the indexers have the ability to add entries to the CV themselves or not.

I found the "introduced" field for the entries showing when a certain term was added. This field is also available through the "i" icon.

INSPEC has its own classification scheme. The classification numbers related to the terms in the thesaurus is also available (if it exists) through the same icon.