

Keywords, Indexing, Text Analysis: An Editorial[†]

Richard P. Smiraglia

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Recently I was asked in earnest why KO doesn't have keywords. To which my reply was to LOL. Really—I laughed, out loud, and then I said “but it does, in every line!”

1.0 A rant

It took awhile for the real issue to settle into my brain so I could give a cogent response. Of course, what my inquisitor was asking was why we don't have a list of author-contrived “keywords” underneath the abstract like so many other journals do. I was chagrined to realize the practice has become so ubiquitous that people entering the discipline think it is normal. Indeed, if one googles “keywords” one finds sets of instructions for phonying up the proper list of keywords on manuscripts such that one can somehow effect future retrieval of the article online. But of course, this is all based on assumptions about a) keywords; b) use of those lists of keywords; c) the role of indexing; and d) the proper functioning of information retrieval (IR).

So first let me say that one reason there are no lists of author-contrived keywords in *Knowledge Organization* is that when I became editor they were not being used. Although I have added review and processing dates (“received, revised, accepted”) to encourage submission of manuscripts—potential authors can see that most papers submitted to this journal that get published, do so within six months, and that is pretty fast in the world of information journals (some of which take years from submission to publication). But as you can tell from my choice of words, I do not think lists of author-contrived keywords are useful. I do not decide whether to read an article in a journal based on those lists. I make my decision based on actual keywords—the ones in the title—and then I read the abstract to see whether I think the article is either of interest to me or of use to my research. And I thought I knew that

indexing services did not use those lists either. The entire use of them seems to stem from a misperception that somehow adding “weighted” terms to the printed page in a journal would improve retrieval using indexing databases. The fact is, the only thing that improves retrieval is formal indexing. We have managed to get both Thompson Reuters and EBSCOHost to index our journal, and in the case of EBSCOHost to make the full-text available online through library subscription portals. That indexing is what will affect the rate at which articles published in our journal are discovered, read, ingested, and cited.

But there is more, of course, to my objection to keywords, and most of it stems from what I perceive to be a naïve understanding of information retrieval. Of course, information retrieval relies on keywords. But it relies on their presence in actual text, and in proximity to other terms (or, keywords). The reality is that actual keywords are everywhere in any journal, ours included.

2.0 A case study

I decided to undertake a little editorial experiment by using the contents of the last two issues of *Knowledge Organization*. Volume 40 (2013) number 1 contained an editorial, 4 peer-reviewed articles, a book review, a classification issues report, and two substantive letters to the editor. Volume 40 (2013) number 2 contained 5 peer-reviewed articles, some ISKO news, and a bibliographic essay book review; unfortunately at the time this was written number 2 had not been indexed by either service. I decided to compare keywords drawn from Thompson Reuters' Web of Science™ and EBSCOHost's *Library and Information Science and Technology Abstracts with Full Text (LISTA)* to the actual keywords pulled from the texts. Full texts were uploaded to *Voyeur* from Hermeneutica.ca—*The Rhetoric of Text Analysis* (<http://hermeneuti.ca/voyeur/>) to derive most frequently used terms (applying an English language stoplist). Table 1 contains those comparative results.

	Web Of Science keywords-plus	LISTA with full text (EBSCO)	Voyeur— Most frequent words
Smiraglia—ISKO 12's Bookshelf—Evolving Intension: An Editorial	none	knowledge management — congresses; information technology; conferences & conventions; international society for knowledge organization (organization) — congresses; mysore (india : state); india	744 unique words conference (29), papers (23), domain (21), figure (17), authors (14)
Hjørland— User-based and cognitive approaches to knowledge organization: a theoretical analysis of the research literature	information-science; critique; behavior	knowledge management; library science; information science; information technology; subjectivity; iphone (smartphone)	2679 unique words information (139), cognitive (105), knowledge (65), studies (60), science (59).
Corrochano et al.— Spanish Research in Knowledge Organization (2002-2010)	none	knowledge management; bibliometrics; information storage & retrieval systems; databases; globalization	1580 unique words authors (71), knowledge (59), organization (46), table (34), research (32)
Tennis—Ethos and Ideology of Knowledge Organization: Toward Precepts for an Engaged Knowledge Organization	none	knowledge management; metadata; buddhism; critical theory; ideology; language & languages	1280 unique words knowledge (73), organization (57), action (49), work (48), violence (46).
Almeida Campos et al.—Information Sciences Methodological Aspects Applied to Ontology Reuse Tools: A Study Based on Genomic Annotations in the Domain of Trypanosomatids	knowledge organization; systems	information science; bioinformatics; qualitative research; trypanosomatidae; ontology; biomedical materials	1716 unique words ontology (113), ontologies (82), information (44), terms (43), reuse (42)
Channon— The Unification of Concept Representations: An Impetus for Scientific Epistemology	none		3036 unique words science (82), time (81), phenomena (77), event (62), schematic (57).
Martínez-Avila and San Segundo— Reader-interest classification concept and terminology historical overview	none		2132 unique words classification (138), library (123), reader-interest (114), libraries (69), public (66)
Marcondes— Knowledge Organization and Representation In Digital Environments: Relations Between Ontology and Knowledge Organization	none		1516 unique words ontology (51), knowledge (47), information (41), classification (36), domain (36)
Oikarinen and Kortelainen—Challenges of Diversity, Consistency and Globalty in Indexing of Local Archeological Artifacts	none		1978 unique words archeological (85), artifacts (79), subnumbers (56), knowledge (48), cataloguing (45)
Sienkiewicz and Kijenska-Dabrowski— Knowledge creation and commercialization activities in Polish public HEUs in the area of technical and engineering sciences	none		1174 unique words research (61), 00 (55), number (42), activity (34), publications (34).
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Table 1. Indexing of contents of *Knowledge Organization* v. 40 nos. 1-2 (2013)

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Table 2. Comparison of LISTA key terms and Voyeur-derived keywords

3.0 Some concluding thoughts

The role of what we call keywords in scholarly discourse has increased to the point that authors add them to manuscripts submitted to *Knowledge Organization* even though we do not ask for them (and delete them in editing). The actual use of keywords is unclear; I doubt readers use them much but it is possible that indexers rely on them. Perhaps that is why the formal indexing in this case study is so problematic. The potential use of keywords for retrieval and indexing seems clear. That is, the presence of keywords, whether in a separate list or in their usual place

in the text, has the potential to influence the formal indexing of research, and also to influence resource-location or selection by researchers.

What is less clear is how those keywords should be generated. Empirical extraction of the terms is most accurate and therefore most reliable for indexing, retrieval or just for text analysis. Should editorial policy change to incorporate the use of formal keywords in *Knowledge Organization* it would make the best sense to generate the terms empirically, using text analysis tools designed for statistical term extraction.

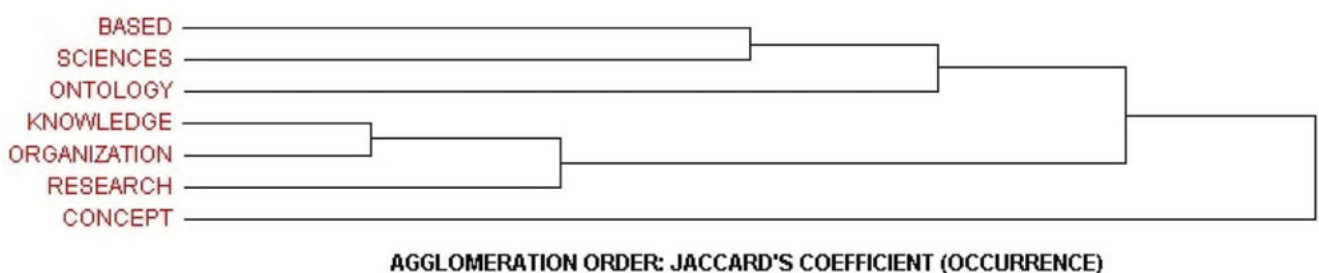


Figure 2. Title keyword co-occurrence dendrogram

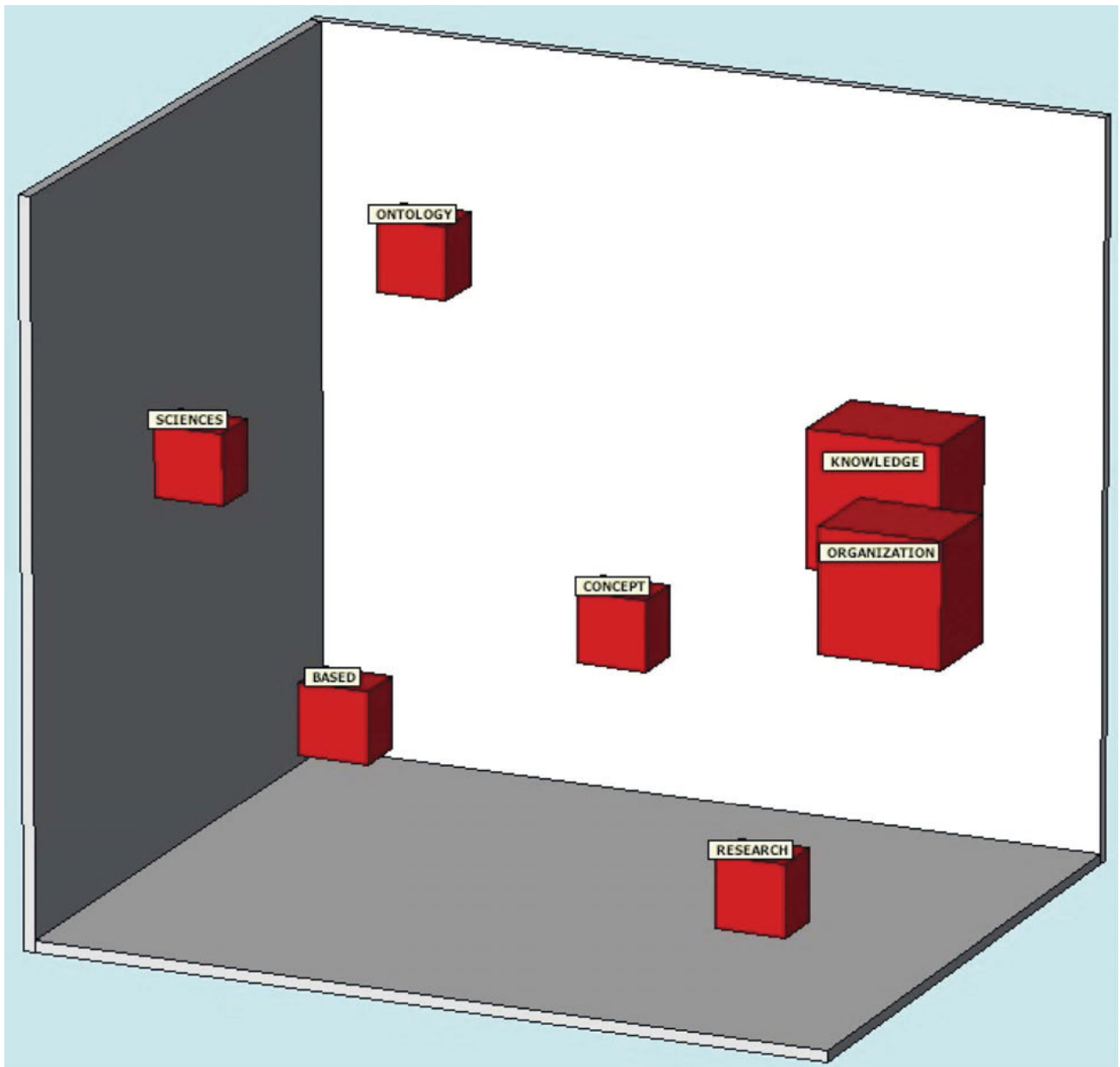


Figure 3. Title keyword co-occurrence three-dimensional MDS plot