

In a Phrase, the Non-Alphabetical Wordbooks

■ ABSTRACT

The paper discusses general-purpose, mostly monolingual, non-alphabetical or partly alphabetical (mostly topical) English-language reference sources that lag behind the A-Z dictionary in overall importance. Among such sources, the thesaurus is the most significant type, though it is far from being the only one. What they have in common is that they have been designed to offer lexical assistance when it comes to questions other than word/phrase comprehension. A variety of reference tools make use of thematization in many different ways, though chiefly in some combination with alphabetization. THE-MATIC/TOPICAL ARRANGEMENT – as a supplement to ALPHABETICAL ARRANGEMENT – remains a useful mode in creating language resources, even though there is no single universally valid method of arrangement in thematic lexicography.

KEY WORDS: *thesaurus, topical, thematization, wordbook*

■ IZVLEČEK

Z eno besedo, neabecedni slovarji

Članek obravnava splošne, predvsem enojezične, neabecedne ali le delno abecedno urejene priročniške vire za angleški jezik, ki so podrejeni abecedno urejenim slovarjem. Čeprav je med njimi najvažnejši tezaver, je danes za angleščino na voljo precejšnje število jezikovnih pripomočkov slovarskega tipa, ki so vsaj delno urejeni neabecedno (največkrat tematsko). Skupno jim je to, da želijo uporabniku pomagati pri vseh tistih leksikalnih vprašanjih, pri katerih NE gre za omogočanje razumevanja besede oz. besedne zveze v (tujem) jeziku. Številni priročniki na razne načine upoštevajo tematsko ureditev, a povečini v kombinaciji z abecednostjo. TEMATSKOST – kot dopolnilo ABECEDNOSTI – je vsekakor koristen organizacijski princip pri sestavi jezikovnih priročnikov, čeprav zanjo nimamo splošno veljavne metode urejanja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *tezaver, tematski, tematskost, jezikovni priročnik*

INTRODUCTION

Alphabetical dictionaries are not the only, and not necessarily the best, way of arranging the words of a language. (McCarthy 1990: 138)

Would you agree with the above observation? Many people take alphabetical ordering for granted just because we all learned the alphabet in the same way, as an **invariant series**. It just leaves no doubts. But the literature is brimming with ideas about semantic ordering, synonym listings, topical arrangements, thematic list words, lexical fields, semantic networks... Even though the alphabetized word-defining or word-translating reference known as the **dictionary** is (still) the order

of the day, there is a lot for the translator to consider in terms of diversified access to lexical items, whether print, CD-ROM, or on-line. This survey of non-alphabetical language reference sources in English is necessarily selective, but judicious care has been applied in what to include and what to leave out. Note that there may be today on offer as many as 15,000 dictionaries of various sizes and types dedicated to the English language alone (Green 1996: 29).

When asked about the "basic" reference sources translators are likely to need the most, the standard answer is usually: One, a general bilingual dictionary (both directions); two, a comprehensive general monolingual L1 (=mother tongue) dictionary; three, a reliable up-to-date desk-size monolingual L2 (=foreign language) dictionary plus a general L2 learners' dictionary; four, a large general encyclopedia such as the CD-ROM version of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or the very comprehensive online-only *Wikipedia*, first started only in 2001. But what about non-alphabetical reference sources?

DICTIONARY VS. THESAURUS

There are many situations in which what translators really need is NOT the **dictionary**, but a work based on **meaning associations** between words and phrases. Such works are needed e.g. when the translator knows that there is a word for a concept but does not know it or cannot think of it, or when a given mother-tongue word is not listed in the relevant bilingual dictionary. But is there a "universal" complement to the dictionary? Well, at best in a restricted sense: The **thesaurus**, a reference source that acts as a complement to the traditional dictionary. A **DICTIONARY** is to be consulted if users have a word in mind they need information about, while a **THESAURUS** is needed if they have a meaning in mind which they want words for.^[1] While the two do not serve the same needs, most users seem to prefer dictionaries, chiefly for three reasons: (1) Their straightforward A-Z arrangement; (2) because they provide manageable information on meaning, usage, and/or pronunciation; (3) because of the simple one-step lookup process. "A dictionary provides information about a *word* by listing its meanings, whereas a thesaurus provides information about an *idea* by listing the range of words and phrases associated with it" (Pitha ed. 1996: vii). Yet many users seem oblivious of this distinction, regarding thesauruses as being less essential and more specialized.

Thesaurus lexicography reflects "the intention to help users with encoding tasks, which involves the grouping of words and phrases into sets of (near-)synonyms so that the most appropriate items can be chosen to express a particular concept" (Hartmann and James 1998: 143) – even if what is involved may be more than synonymy alone.

Most thesauruses merely *list semantically related* words rather than explaining their meaning: Their approach is **onomasiological** (from meaning to word), that is, one that starts with a concept and enumerates possible lexical items whereby that concept can be expressed. Dictionaries, by contrast, are **semasiological** (from word to meaning): They list words and provide their meanings. Thus although in an alphabetical dictionary *animals* and *zoos*, for example, are far apart, in the human mind (and hence in a thesaurus) they are close together. General thesauruses are thus designed to help the user find the word(s) or phrase(s) they do not know or cannot remember.^[2]

This duality is usually close to the distinction between alphabetical and thematic organization (semasiological=alphabetical, onomasiological=thematic). Onomasiological resources are chiefly useful for **encoding** activities (here L1-to-L2 translation), and they are not particularly useful for beginners, “first because they usually demand a higher command of the target language, and second because they will surely be more motivated to use the kind of dictionaries with which they are most familiar in their native language, that is, alphabetical dictionaries” (Márquez Linares 1998: 167).

Despite this distinction, the two modes can be – and have been – combined in a single reference work (see below), and “combining a semasiological with an onomasiological dictionary is an old dream of lexicographers” (Geeraerts 2000: 80).

Although the thesaurus has been given much less attention than the dictionary, the number of English thesauruses and other non-alphabetical reference tools published in the last decade or so is quite large.¹

One important point: Whatever the nature of the non-alphabetical tools discussed below, it is a fact that they almost never *really* ignore alphabetization.

THESAURUS DEFINED

The word **thesaurus** has several senses (McArthur ed. 1992: 1040); not all of them are relevant in this paper² that focuses on those language reference tools including the modern thesaurus, specifically of English, in which general

¹ Some linguists (e.g. Sierra 2000) have recognized an urgent need for more “onomasiological dictionaries.”

² Specifically, I have ignored the **documentation thesaurus**, aka **field thesaurus** or **information retrieval thesaurus**, a specialized tool comprising a classified list of terms for use in indexing and information retrieval in specific fields of knowledge (a selection of such works can be found on the “Web Thesaurus Compendium” website, listed in the bibliography).

vocabulary items are organized semantically rather than alphabetically. The relevant senses are as follows:

- (1) a work of reference presented as a treasure house of information about words (whether monolingual, bilingual, alphabetical, or thematic)
- (2) a work of reference containing lists of associated, usually undefined, words (such as synonyms), arranged thematically
- (3) a work of reference containing such lists but presented alphabetically.

Peters and Kilgariff (2000: 288), who define *thesaurus* simply as “a resource in which words with similar meanings are grouped together,” point out that “the varieties” include not only Roget, Macquarie and others, produced to help writers with word selection, but also WordNet and EuroWordNet (lexical databases based on psycholinguistic principles), thesauruses produced manually for use in information retrieval systems (domain-specific thesauruses), and “automatic thesauruses” produced by processing corpora. Again, this essay is restricted to the first of these.

Some linguists regard the thesaurus as a kind of dictionary; some others equate it with the dictionary of synonyms, whether with synonym discussions such as Belanger (ed. 1987) (**discriminating synonymy**), or with mere lists of synonyms (**cumulative synonymy**). The two differ in kind, and are designed to serve different needs. Second, thesauruses that do not contain synonym discriminations may be either narrowly synonym-oriented or semantically broader, the former providing “paradigmatic” information, the latter offering both “paradigmatic” and “analogical” information (Ilson 1991: 294)^[3]. Thus Lipka (2002: 42) defines the thesaurus as a type of “non-alphabetical, thematical reference book” in which “lexical items are arranged on a more or less intuitively determined basis of similarity of meaning and association. This principle of arrangement is more linguistic than a mere alphabetical listing. However, in practice, explicit semantic criteria are not used and normally modern linguistic research in the area is not drawn upon.”

THE THESAURUS: ITS USE

The thesaurus can in most cases be used profitably only by proficient native speakers, since the user must, one, distinguish between close and distant synonyms, establish register, distinguish common and rare words, match collocations, etc. (Rogers 1996: 81), and two, already know what the words offered actually mean – or else s/he would be at a loss when it comes to selecting the right word without consulting other reference sources, which would make the

whole process complex and time-consuming. The prime target user of such a work is thus likely to be the ADULT EDUCATED NATIVE SPEAKER looking for that elusive word s/he already knows but cannot recall. Parenthetically, the same type of user can be said to be the prime user of synonym discriminations, of which – despite several recent rather superficial attempts – the best two were published way back in the 1960s (Hayakawa 1968/1971 and Gove ed. 1968).

While such a work represents an attempt to organize vocabulary in terms of meaning, it has often come under fire for its alleged subjective arrangement³. Not one of them has “uncovered the key to conceptual universality, which is at best elusive and at worst ill-conceived” (Rogers 1996: 82). As Lipka (2002: 43) observes, Roget’s *Thesaurus*⁴ and many later works are organized according to logical connection and semantic likeness, that is, subject matter. They are not based on a strict semantic classification. On the other hand, the alphabet (McArthur 1986a: 162) is convenient because it represents an **objective series** known to everybody, while thematization exists in a multitude of forms and is thus a **subjective, variant series**. Yet semantic arrangement does make sense, if only because words evoke **semantic networks** that can be language-specific (Kramsch 1998: 131, 17): Hence the steady flow of thematic wordbooks, often designed to be used in conjunction with rather than instead of alphabetized sources. The era of the electronic dictionary available on CD-ROM is likely to contribute to the creation of an improved reference tool – one incorporating a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a general encyclopedia, and with diversified search facilities. The **translator’s workbench** (Rogers 1996: 71, 83–89), a sophisticated set of computer tools, is one way of doing it.

The **bilingual thesaurus**, general or specialized, is not the subject of this paper. General bilingual thesauruses are few in number; the very first English/French thesaurus I am aware of came out only in 1998 (Lamy 1998). Designed for English-speaking users of French, it is arranged thematically, with subdivisions into topic categories, and with two A–Z indexes – English–French and French–English – of 8,000 words each. It contains 15 major sections (subdivided into a total of 142 subheadings): position, movement and travel; time; the natural environment; everyday things; society, family and relationships; emotions, feelings and attitudes; wanting; knowledge and thought processes; body

³ In fact, the thesaurus has been taken to task on several counts (e.g. in Crystal 1995: 158), notably for failing to provide definitions associated with lists of semantically related items, indicate the stylistic levels at which the lexemes are used, provide a principled basis to the way lexemes are organized within entry paragraphs, and list also the less commonly occurring lexemes.

⁴ Peter Mark Roget (1779–1869) was a British physician who originated the thesaurus, bringing out the first edition of his *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* in 1852.

and health; food and drink; work and leisure; money, worth, economy; abstract terms to describe the world; ways of communicating; and conversational gambits. It lists analogous words, phrases and expressions and includes many examples of use, aside from explaining in what contexts the different synonyms are to be used. There are also paragraph-long explanations of certain (especially culture-bound) terms such as *le tiers provisionnel* (p. 185), *bank cards* (p. 181), and *being asked to produce documents* (p. 206). Another general bilingual thesaurus is the Serbocroatian-English work by Dajković (1981). Alphabetization and thematization can be combined in both words and pictures, usually with the addition of back-matter alphabetical indexes: e.g. Walter (ed. 1994) comprises 450 categories of words grouped by topic or semantic relatedness, many subcategorized, and 48 "language-for-communication" situation-specific expressions (mostly from spoken language).

THESAURUSES TODAY: TITLES AND TYPES

General monolingual thesauruses of the English language often exist in a variety of formats, with smaller "spinoffs" of larger works, ranging from the pocket-size editions (e.g. Schwarz ed. 1992 and Spooner comp. 1992) through popular paperback editions (e.g. Pearsons and O'Connor eds. 1996 and Princeton Language Institute ed. 1993), all the way to the respectable "college" productions (e.g. Sutherland rev. and ed. 1998 and Jellis ed. 2002). Some of them are **conceptual** (e.g. Daintith et al. eds. 1993, Kirkpatrick ed. 1987/1998, Kipfer ed. 2001), but many more are **alphabetical** (e.g. Mackie and Butterfield eds. 2002, Hanks ed. 2000/2004, Manser ed. 2004; Urdang 1991/1997 and Jellis ed. 2002 each offer dual access to their entries). Loughridge (1990: 105) observes that "A thesaurus is nowadays generally understood to be a list of words either systematically arranged according to their meanings or the ideas or concepts they express, or listed alphabetically with their synonyms, and, sometimes, antonyms and related phrases." Since most modern desk-size thesauruses are alphabetical, they are different from dictionaries only in that they do not claim to explain or define word senses but only to provide synonyms and related words.

A thesaurus can be arranged also in terms of alphabetized concepts (Bernard ed. 1990); moreover, there may be lexical information added to mere lists of semantically related items making up thesaurus entries, chiefly in the alphabetical variety (definitions of each sense of polysemous headwords and/or example sentences showing meanings). Finally, at least one work provides unusual equivalents or related items of general-language words while sticking to the familiar thesaurus format (Ehrlich 1994).

HYBRIDS AND OTHER NON-ALPHABETICAL BREEDS

As a reference tool, the general thesaurus is often felt to be of limited usefulness, because it merely **lists** alternatives and/or semantically related items, thus performing chiefly the function of a memory jogger for proficient language users. For this reason, a few works try to combine various types of information, notably definitions, examples of use, and semantically related word lists organized along looser principles of **semantic relatedness**. All alphabetical, such works were created out of the recognition that what the user seeks is "a more appropriate term than the one he has in mind" (Doherty ed. 1989: iii). However, since the user may be seeking "a synonym, a word stronger or weaker in force, one of slightly different meaning, a more starchy or more folksy word, an idiomatic phrase that conveys the same idea, or a word that to a greater or lesser degree contrasts with his starting point" (Kay ed. 1976: 3a, Doherty ed. 1989: iii), there exists also e.g. *Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus* (Kay ed. 1976)⁵, a thesaurus-like wordbook where synonym lists are supplemented with lists of "related" and "contrasted" words.

There are also a few *hybrid works* available with elements of both thesauruses and dictionaries, mostly designed for advanced learners of English, also referred to as **onomasiological learners' dictionaries** or **learners' thesauruses**, notably

- a – McArthur's pioneering *Longman Lexicon* (1981), organized in fourteen pragmatic semantic fields. This work combines thematization with linguistic semantic structuring;
- b – the innovative, basic-concept-based "production dictionary," *Longman Language Activator*TM (Summers ed. 1993/2002), and the intermediate-level, more pedagogical but also considerably modified *Essential Activator* (Summers and Gadsby eds. 1997). The 2002 *Activator*TM is also available on the CD-ROM version of the 4th edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Summers ed. 2003);
- *Oxford Learner's Wordfinder Dictionary* (Trappes-Lomax 1997), a vocabulary-building tool featuring 630 alphabetized keywords with reverse-dictionary type of treatment including many contextualized examples, plus 23 front-matter topic areas, each with further subdivisions. It is available also on the CD-ROM of the latest edition of Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Wehmeier ed. 2005);

⁵ A later version of this work is conveniently available free of charge at <http://www.m-w.com/thesaurus.htm>.

- the Cambridge bilingual *Word Routes* series (started 1994), a set of thematic and illustrated dictionaries geared toward the learner of English, such as Walter (ed. 1994);
- "pedagogical" bilingual thesauruses such as Lamy (ed. 1998), or the monolingual Lee (1983), the latter referred to as a "pragmalinguistic" thesaurus.

MOREOVER, THERE EXIST TODAY A HOST OF "COMBINED WORDBOOKS"

- (1) Combining features of dictionaries with those of thesauruses, whether in two successive sections, the dictionary-part usually followed by the thesaurus-part; with thesaural entries appended to the relevant dictionary entries only (e.g. Tulloch ed. 1995 and the pocket-size Makins ed. 1990); or with the thesaurus part following the relevant dictionary entries on a page-by-page ("divided page") basis, both covering the same section of the alphabet.⁶ Oxford University Press (<http://www.oup.co.uk>) and HarperCollins Publishers (<http://www.collins.co.uk>) in particular each offer a range of such combined works typically providing their selections of alternative words with matching dictionary and thesaurus entries together on the same page for one-stop lookup.
- (2) Presenting "combined" lexical information in some semantics-based (thematic) fashion, virtually always in some combination with alphabetization. This may well be the optimum reference format (cf. Chapman 1974). Major English-language dictionary publishers now routinely offer a combined dictionary and thesaurus (Fraser 2003: 34).

Other variations include Kipfer (2002), which combines indiscriminated synonyms with a reverse dictionary, to be briefly discussed below.

Some of the works referred to belong to the dynamic tradition of the English monolingual learners' dictionaries. The **onomasiological dictionary** tradition, formerly represented in the pedagogical field only by McArthur (1981), not only spawned several new types of work (referred to above) but also resulted in the fact that the leading English monolingual learners' dictionaries on CD-ROM (*Oxford, Longman, Collins COBUILD, Cambridge*, but not *Macmillan*)

⁶ Hartmann and James (1998: 143, 69) enter the term **thesaurus-cum-dictionary** and its synonym **hybrid**, where they recognize only one type of a thesaurus in combination with a general dictionary, viz. the one "which splits each page into a traditional dictionary section and a thesaurus section from the corresponding part of the alphabet."

now offer also “semantic” access to vocabulary items that is *not* available in the print versions. Thus the *Longman* (Summers ed. 2003) CD-ROM incorporates not only the 2002 *Activator*TM, but also another two “topical” features, viz. the Word set button on the toolbar and the Subject search facility (ten basic “themes,” each subdivided first into “headings” and each of these in turn into “subject areas”). Two, the revised *Cambridge* (Gillard ed. 2003 / Walter ed. 2005) offers the “Smart Thesaurus” facility; what you get with each headword is two features showing in two adjacent windows: Topicalized list of words followed in the next window by the same list where each item appears complete with the standard lexicographical treatment. Also, its Advanced Search facility enables you to find, for example, 154 matches of AmE (“region”) terms in the field of education (“topic”), or over 5000 AmE (“region”) terms. Three, the 2001 *COBUILD* on CD-ROM (Sinclair ed. 2001) – sold, unlike the others, as a separate product – includes a small but useful alphabetical *Collins Thesaurus*. However, the CD-ROM accompanying 2003 *COBUILD Dictionary* (Sinclair ed. 2003)⁷ has dropped this feature. Four, the *Oxford Advanced* (Wehmeier ed. 2005) incorporates also *Oxford Learner’s Wordfinder* (Trappes Lomax 1997).

Next, there are various “specialized thesauruses”, say the 600-page historical thesaurus of “love, sex, and marriage” (Coleman 1999), testifying to the complexity of human closest social and emotional relationships. It is arranged by meaning, the terms being listed chronologically within semantic fields, with dates of usage, notes on individual terms, and background information about changes in social conditions, religious beliefs, and medical advancements. Such works are clearly beyond the scope of this survey.

There are also in existence wordbooks that combine thesaural information with various other types of lexical data; e.g. Berold (1987) is a thematic vocabulary book including collocational information and warnings about false friends.

Thanks to the advent of computerization, such combined works are likely to proliferate in the years to come, particularly online. Tulloch (ed. 1995), for example, is a 1900-page print dictionary and thesaurus in fully integrated text (300,000 synonyms and over 190,000 dictionary definitions) created by electronically splicing and trimming (McArthur with Becker and Blaney 1999: 260) two wordbooks: *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (8th edition [Allen ed. 1990]) and *Oxford Thesaurus* (Urdang 1991), with 23 encyclopedic appendices thrown in for good measure, the synonyms given being keyed to each meaning they are related to. However, the optimum format and size of the alphabetical and the semantic modes combined may not be this easy to achieve. Integrated dic-

⁷ Note that overall, the 4th edition of the *COBUILD* underwent very little revision compared with the 3rd one.

tionary and thesaurus tools demonstrating the flexibility of online sources are now available on the Web (cf. especially <http://www.wordsmyth.net/> and <http://www.yourdictionary.com/>), some offering additional reference tools (e.g. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>).

Importantly (Rundell and Ham 1994: 175), there is a distinction between the **semantic-field** and the **concept-based** approaches. The former approach (e.g. McArthur 1981) to e.g. CRIME includes specific types of crime, such as *murder* or *shoplifting*. By contrast, the concept-based approach (e.g. Summers ed. 1993/2002) covers these notions in the areas where they belong *CONCEPTUALLY: murder* at KILL (which is where a student wishing to encode this notion would naturally look), and *shoplift* at STEAL.

Some authors argue for the basic pair of the **semantic-field** (or **associative**) **approach** vs. the **synonym-based approach**, which roughly corresponds to the distinction between the CONCEPTUAL THESAURUS and the ALPHABETICAL THESAURUS (Landau (2001: 138–41). The former's entry structure is much broader and semantically diverse, while the latter's is narrower and tighter. This is quite logical, given that a broad concept preceded and followed by its related concepts can be handled in a semantically much more detailed and diverse manner; strict alphabetization, by contrast, calls for a semantically more focused approach, as the A–Z headwords following each other will often be totally unrelated in meaning, each representing a veritable "world of its own."

There is little empirical evidence about how such works are used in practical language work. Lewis (1997: 209) e.g. believes that it is "most helpful if users simply browse under particular headings so that half-remembered lexis is re-activated for them."

MORE RELATED WORDBOOKS

There are on the English-language-reference market also a number of related topical tools such as **pictorial dictionaries** and "**reverse**" **dictionaries**^[4]. The former include Clark and Mohan (eds. 1995), an all-English version of the Duden line of pictorial dictionaries, where an alphabetical index – two indexes in bilingual versions – is linked to numeric references identifying the given page and the individual drawing corresponding to each term. Its competitors include Corbeil and Manser (1988), the comprehensive, 35,000-item Corbeil and Archambault (eds. 2002), and several pictorial dictionaries combining photographs and drawings with textual material, such as the specialized Bragonier and Fisher (eds. 1984), or the more general, "twice topical" – on two levels – Evans et al. (eds. 1998), often in a format that is more modern than that of the *Duden*.

The reverse-dictionary category, or the WORD-FINDING DICTIONARIES category, includes Bernstein (1988), Kahn (ed. 1989), and Edmonds (ed. 2002), Kahn (ed. 1989) combining elements of the pictorial dictionary and thematization in general (e.g. list of Indian terms, picture of insect, picture of leaf shapes, table of terms pertaining to laboratory equipment, where thematization and alphabetization often interact) – plus a 10,000-entry A-Z dictionary of “tricky or reasonably difficult terms” (p. 577) – with the “reverse” dictionary proper. Edmonds (ed. 2002), designed to help you find words you know but cannot bring to mind, contains 31,000 entry-words grouped under a wide range of subject areas and key words/concepts. Another hybrid is the 700-page Kipfer (2002); combining features of a dictionary of indiscriminated synonyms with those of the reverse dictionary, it was designed for users who know the elusive word they want to say but just cannot think of, but can describe what they are thinking. It incorporates thesaurus-type synonym entries (e.g. **abound:** *crawl, flourish, overflow, swarm, teem*; **above all:** *chiefly, especially, indeed, mostly, primarily*) as well as reverse-dictionary entries organized under various “cue” or “clue” words (=those you know) that lead you to the “target” words (=those you need), e.g. **accuse and charge with crime:** *indict, crime, to accuse formally of:* *charge, indict, charge with an offense: indict*; **accent on last syllable, word with:** *oxytone*, plus dozens of topical lists, charts, and tables, say the list of acids, clothing types, and tools. A more specialized topical wordbook lists thousands of adjectives and adverbs divided into 572 thematic categories (Kipfer 2003); you get an array of word choices used to describe someone/something. Another specialized work, Kipfer (2001), has been designed for people who need a synonym not for single words but for **phrases** such as *flower arrangement, sports arena, or crowning achievement*. Its 10,000 alphabetized multi-word entries lead the user to synonyms of phrases. While showing ingenuity, such works contain a highly subjective selection of items and are thus of limited value. They are entertaining and interesting to browse, chiefly designed as resources for writers and word lovers; much of what they list belongs to the arcane vocabulary that many users may be better off avoiding.

There is also the “world’s only full-language reverse-dictionary” that promises to take you from a mere idea to the precise word, Henry G. Burger’s *Wordtree* (1984 and later revisions), a somewhat controversial though highly original but also expensive and widely publicized and reviewed American work (cf. Burger 1988 and Riggs 1989) that readers of this survey are urged to look at for themselves (<http://www.wordtree.com>).

Other related **topical/thematic tools** include either TOPICAL WORDBOOKS such as Glazier (1992) and McCutcheon (1992/2003), or WORD-FINDERS in a specialized sense of the term (e.g. Welsh 1989, Grambs 1993, Sisson 1994), the

latter chiefly leading the user to a highly personal – and thus arbitrary – selection of unusual, specialized, foreign (sometimes verging on the bizarre) words rather than to lists of related words. The bulky Glazier (1992) arranges – and defines – its 75,000 entries “in a logical structure” (inside front flap) in some 800 divisions organized in 7 major sections (Nature, Science and Technology, Domestic Life, Institutions, Arts and Leisure, Language, The Human Condition), with a full A–Z index. McCutcheon (1995/2003) combines a concise A–Z thesaurus with a “word-find reverse dictionary,” adding elements of a vocabulary builder. Some works employing both alphabetization and thematization are difficult to classify; for instance, a German *Lernwörterbuch in Sachgruppen* (Pollmann-Laverentz and Pollmann 1982) is organized in 201 topicalized lists, each listing non-alphabetized English-language items that are followed by two columns: Their equivalent(s) in German and typical English collocations where they exist, with an A–Z index of English words (pp. 249–84). Also, Basescu (1976), a tiny paperback “designed to increase *your* speech color and fluency” (p. 1), is divided into five sections grouping related words, “each concerned with one area of thought” (back cover), and each with further subdivisions. The front matter contains the Scan Key (the contents), and there is an A–Z index (pp. 95–132), preceded by an appendix of foreign terms (pp. 86–94). Each entry is briefly defined only in its relation to the group in which it occurs.

Some of the sources are only available in print form, while others exist in CD-ROM versions (as well), and some are available online (notably Jost ed. 1995 and the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus* [cf. footnote 5], both free of charge, unlike *Roget's New Millennium™ Thesaurus* [Kipfer ed. 2005]). There is also the original WordNet®, an online-only lexical reference system inspired by psycholinguistic theories of human lexical memory. Some 140,000 English nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are organized into synonym sets, each representing one underlying lexical concept. Different relations link the synonym sets. Finally, another two online works of interest to translators are the *Think-map Visual Thesaurus*, and the *OneLook Reverse Dictionary*.

THEMATIZATION GALORE

Thematization of any conceivable type – but usually combined with alphabetization – in reference works is quite common, typically in the form of a thematic index following the main A–Z section, say in proverb dictionaries (e.g. Fergusson 1983), in slang dictionaries (e.g. Spears 1998, Dickson 1998)^[5], in pictorial dictionaries (Corbeil and Manser eds. 1988), and in dictionaries of euphemisms (Bertram 1998). But even these thematic indexes are commonly

organized alphabetically, in terms of both topical categories and the items listed within each category. Second, alphabetization is amply present in the thematic organization of the main body of many reference books followed by an A-Z index, including the famous *Guinness Book of World Records* (e.g. Matthews ed. 1996), slang dictionaries (e.g. Ayto 1998), and “factfinders” (e.g. Crystal ed. 2003) that are organized in a dozen or so broad areas of knowledge, each of which is then broken down into subsections.⁸ Both of these “list-of-contents-type” sections usually form part of the front matter. The extremely varied main part of works such as factfinders is commonly followed by a detailed A-Z index. The back-matter index can be left out (e.g. in Franck 1990), the idea being that the twin front-matter lists will be enough for most reference purposes. Even such encyclopedic (in contrast to lexical) works as a dictionary of inventions (Messadié 1991) can display thematic arrangement; in such sources, the typical pattern of arrangement is twofold:

- one, **topical chapters** (e.g. agriculture and food; chemistry and physics; communication, culture and the media; daily life, etc.) given in A-Z fashion, each chapter consisting of a number of - again alphabetized - encyclopedic-type entries (e.g. agriculture and food: biological battle against insects; canned food; cereal crops; chemical pesticides; fertilizer; harvester; incubators; irrigation; livestock rearing, etc.),
- two, an **alphabetical index** of headwords and other entries.

So, in such cases a topical work makes use of alphabetization on three levels.

Another common pattern is alphabetized entries followed by a back-matter index ordered by field and, within each field, again alphabetically, the fields themselves being typically, if somewhat unexpectedly or even illogically, listed yet again alphabetically. An *A-Z of Modern America* (Duchak 1999), for instance, has sizable Indexes (pp. 371-405) divided into clothing, customs and traditions, daily life, economy, education, environment, foreign policy, health, history, housing and architecture, immigration, language, etc. A reference work on Britain (Room 1990) follows a similar arrangement: A back-matter index (pp. 431-69) containing categories such as animal world, charities, clothing, daily life, education, food and drink, history, language, law, life and society, London (over 130 entries!), and media. In any case, there must be thousands

⁸ This organization makes such works partly different from the alphabetized variety: Chalker (1999: 243) notes that a topical slang dictionary's (Ayto 1998) format “is unquestionably useful if you want to learn as many slang synonyms as possible for a particular word or phrase or to explore the language of a particular area of meaning,” or to “explore a concept,” while an alphabetized competitor “is a better choice if you are interested in the range of meanings belonging to a word or phrase” - which is the very essence of monolingual dictionaries.

of situations where the non-alphabetical organization of a limited lexical inventory makes perfect sense, whether or not for translation purposes: It certainly makes sense, for example, to provide, s.v. **games**, a list comprising not only games named but also e.g. "place," "equipment," "person in charge," and "scoring," (say *basketball - court - ball - referee - point*). Sometimes, such key items - highlighted - are given in context, as in Bragonier and Fisher (eds. 1984). In Evans et al. (eds. 1998), most double-page spreads combine pictorial material with mini-essays on the topic in question (e.g. Jurassic period, p. 70; insects, p. 168; digestive system, p. 248; train equipment, p. 330; fresco, p. 434; guitars, p. 512; ice hockey, p. 550; CD-ROM, p. 584).

A special type of **"mini" thematization** that is useful for logical reasons can be found e.g. in the pocket-size DeVinne (ed. 1990), a dictionary of discriminated synonyms with several appendices including "collateral adjectives" (pp. 258-71), i.e. adjectives that correspond to certain nouns in meaning but not in form, such as *cattle - bovine*, *back - dorsal*, *year - annual*, *son - filial*, *chance - fortuitous*, not to mention the innocent-looking *leaf* and its adjectival monsters *foliaceous*, *foliar*, *foliate*, *foliose*, *frondescent*, and *frondose*. These lists are given alphabetically by noun in topical sections (e.g. zoology, time, family, general). Such adjectives can be further broken down: Schur (1987: 9-13) restricts them by providing a listing, in facing columns, of those "collateral adjectives" ending solely in *-ine* that designate zoological or entomological families (e.g. *feline - cats*, *ovine - sheep*, *ursine - bears*, not to mention *rupicaprine - chamoix* and *tolypeutine - armadillos*). While such items do not seem likely candidates for core vocabulary lists, they do group semantically related words that get listed far apart from each other through the vagaries of alphabetization.

As Augarde (2000: 136) observes, practical problems associated with thematic lexicons are considerable: Words related in sense are not necessarily easy to group together. Second, alphabetical order is the norm because it is, for most purposes, the most user-friendly arrangement. These may well be two powerful reasons why thematization as an organizing principle is (still) regarded as being inferior to the "ordered" alphabetization, though the underlying organization of the mental lexicon is all semantic and not one bit alphabetical. Small wonder, then, that (Jackson and Zé Amvela 2000: 165) there is no thematically arranged general dictionary, although thematic lexicography has a long tradition, and although "many lexicographers still find the thematic arrangement a useful and revealing way of arranging words" (e.g. Godman and Payne 1979, McArthur 1981).

Although thematic lexicography had existed long before Roget^[6], Roget's *Thesaurus* (1852) was the first full-fledged conceptually arranged thesaurus. It tried to arrange all the words of English in a hierarchical structure (Miller 1991: 159). Its basic structure grouping items according to logical connection,

association, and semantic likeness has remained unchanged.⁹ It was followed more than half a century later by the alphabetical variety, identified as "Roget's *Thesaurus* in dictionary form," a semantically tighter wordbook often restricted to the provision of near-synonyms and sometimes antonyms, today the dominant variety thanks to the overall simplicity and ease of access associated with alphabetical ordering universally known in one and the same form, as contrasted with the inherently idiosyncratic topical arrangement.

While Roget expected users of his book to master his system of categories and thus to begin their word searches with it – i.e. conceptually – rather than with the alphabetical index, most people using Roget's thesaurus to find a particular word today typically first consult the index for some related but more general word. There they are directed to the appropriate categories of semantically related words.

CONCEPTUAL VS. ALPHABETICAL: THE IMPLICATIONS

As to their entry arrangement, thesauruses are either **alphabetical** or **conceptual**. The alphabetical variety, very popular precisely because of its straightforward dictionary arrangement, is associated with more selectivity in the number of entries (rare words, names, and types of things are generally excluded) and is thus more narrowly **SYNONYM-ORIENTED**, because each concept-entry, being as it is listed alphabetically, represents a "semantic world of its own," being preceded and followed as a rule by semantically totally unrelated items (e.g. the headwords **mortify**, **mother**, **motif**, **motion**).

By contrast, the conceptual variety, which seems to be losing ground because the use of its printed versions calls for a two-stage lookup process that takes up more time, is associated with extreme inclusiveness (rare, non-English, obsolete items and proper names are included without any apparent principle of selection), and is more loosely **SEMANTIC-FIELD-ORIENTED**, or even semantic-association-focused, because each concept-entry is preceded and followed by semantically related concept-entries (e.g. the entries **angle**, **curve**, **straightness**, **circularity**). This type of thesaurus is basically a non-alphabetized sequence of categories of semantically related lexical items based on conceptual proximity; its thematic classification is based either on a detailed categorization/

⁹ Despite the typical focus of many authors on the conceptual organization, Roget did what most of his followers did as well: Use alphabetization in the back-matter index, and take into account grammar, by organizing the entries by word classes (nouns followed by adjectives, verbs, and so on, within any given entry-article).

hierarchization indicative of more philosophical intellectual abstractions (notably Roget's 1852 *Thesaurus*), or on more pragmatic categories (e.g. McArthur 1981). True, the electronic thesaurus obviates the need to first consult an A-Z index, but then such use comes close to consulting an A-Z thesaurus in the first place.

Alphabetical thesauruses tend to be more homogeneous than conceptual thesauruses, though the basic problem common to any thesaurus – the number of (near-)synonyms and other semantically related items listed after a headword – remains: Where is “the cut-off point after which words become so remote from the headword that their presence becomes misleading?” (McArthur with Becker and Blaney 1999: 261)

In fact, BOTH alphabetical and conceptual thesauruses rely on alphabetization (Landau 2001: 139): In the alphabetical ones, the user is advised to go either straight to the alphabetized entry, whereas in the conceptual ones, the user is told to consult the A-Z index first, and then to move to the main part and find there the item first looked up in the index, plus an array of lexical items related to it semantically. Further, alphabetization and thematization combined can be found in a variety of reference sources (e.g. Franck 1990, Matthews ed. 1996, Spears et al. 1994, or Fergusson 1983), frequently with a front-matter outline of contents, a thematic organization in the main body, and a detailed A-Z index in the back. In such works, each thematic section is usually arranged alphabetically. Occasionally, thematic sections offer “additional” help; *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (Walter and Pye eds. 1998), for instance, offers back-matter Theme Panels (pp. 439–54) showing topic groups of “idioms grouped according to their meaning or function” (ibid., p. vii) (e.g. anger, business, happiness and sadness, health, intelligence and stupidity, money, remembering and forgetting, speaking and conversation, success and failure). Indeed, quite a few dictionaries of idioms contain a thematic index, such as *COBUILD Idioms* (Sinclair ed. 2002) with its 17-page thematic index preceding the 70-page A-Z index, or the *Cambridge American Idioms* (Heacock ed. 2003) with a 16-page back-matter thematic index. Of course, all of these works incorporate also sizable alphabetical indexes.

Finally, the two modes have existed side by side for centuries (McArthur 1995). For instance, a standard conceptually arranged thesaurus (Chapman ed. 1992) was published in an A-Z version too (Chapman ed. 1994).

So: It seems that the basic organizing principle of the monolingual general-language thesaurus is **word association**. But this means admitting to a vague, subjective, and idiosyncratic type of organization. It is, then, easy to understand why there have been so far very few successful attempts at organizing lexical information non-alphabetically.

USING THE THESAURUS

Overall, the thesaurus is a tool for **encoding** rather than decoding, and those who can put it to good use are mainly proficient (educated) native speakers and advanced foreign learners/users. A thesaurus will be used when "our principal problem is not to find the exact meaning of a word but to find the exact word for a meaning which is floating, so to speak, in our heads," that is, when we are "stuck for the 'right' word" (Quirk and Stein 1990: 170). This implies the semantically looser semantic-field type of thesaurus rather than the synonym one. Partington (1998: 46-47) concludes that since being able to make a choice among a selection of near-synonyms calls for acquiring as much information as possible about the contexts in which each lexical item is used (as each has its own pattern of behavior), the thesaurus - which simply gives lists of synonyms - "is positively dangerous for the non-native speaker." However, his reviewer (Horváth 2001) disagrees, calling for an empirical comparison of the naturalness of the writing of learners who used a thesaurus and those who did not for a given writing task.

According to Hatch and Brown (1995: 383), there seems to be natural progression in the type of dictionaries that learners prefer: They go from picture dictionaries to bilingual dictionaries, and then to monolingual dictionaries and thesauruses. Thesauruses "are principally of use to those who wish to expand their vocabulary and improve precision of expression, avoid repetitiveness in speech or writing and the use of obscure or hackneyed words, choose the appropriate level of word for each occasion, or simply to identify a vaguely remembered word or phrase ..." (Loughridge 1990: 105).

As to specific groups, **writers** are likely to consult thesauruses for stylistic variation (synonyms); **students** will resort to them to, well, please their teachers, but perhaps also to improve their writing (synonyms); **translators** use them for various encoding tasks (not only synonyms). **Advertisers** seem to be mostly in need of synonym-oriented works, **word-game players** preferring comprehensive conceptually arranged tools.

Endnotes

- [1] Discussions of the subject refer to the "traditionally alphabetic" kind of wordbook, in the first place the dictionary, and to what are variously known as "topical," "thematic," or "classified" reference works; sometimes both are labeled *dictionaries*.
- [2] Hartmann and James (1998: 101-2) cite three typical examples of onomasiological dictionaries: thesaurus, synonym dictionary, and word-finding (or "reverse") dictionary; such works present words or phrases as expressions of semantically linked concepts, which may be meanings, ideas, notions, word families and similar relationships that can be designated

in different ways: by pictures, words, terms, definitions, synonyms or translation equivalents. The important criterion is the direction from concept to word, rather than from word to explanation. ... "Because of this conceptual, systematic or ideological approach, thematic order is sometimes preferred to alphabetical order."

Monolingual learners' dictionaries now do include non-alphabetical information; thus the *Hornby* dictionary (Wehmeier ed. 2005: 99, 159) provides a vocabulary-building note on how to express the concepts of BAD and VERY BAD, and a note (action / part of body / you are...) on actions expressing emotions, e.g. *bite / lips / nervous*.

- [3] In Ilson's (1991: 294) words, "analogical" information (=information about the lexical field of which a given lexical unit is a part) is given sparingly by English-language dictionaries and thesauruses, but more extensively by French dictionaries. An English-language "alphabetical and analogical" dictionary might at its entry for *horse* provide cross-references to types of horse (*mare, pony*), its colors (*bay, roan*), its parts (*hock, pastern*), its gaits (*trot, canter*), and other "horsy" words (*saddle, jockey, gymkhana*). Such items do get grouped in conceptual thesauruses, whose basic organizing principle (=word association) often contributes to an overall impression of a lack of systematicity.

- [4] The reason for quotes around the adjective *reverse* is that this is a popular sense; in stricter linguistic usage, *reverse dictionary* (Hartmann and James 1998: 119, 9) is a scholarly reference work characterized by "the back-to-front arrangement of items," i.e. one that lists words in reverse alphabetical order, that is, alphabetically by last-to-first rather than first-to-last letter order, so that words ending in *a* come first and those ending in *z* come last (Crystal 1997: 414), e.g.:

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| redemption | option |
| exemption | adoption |
| resumption | eruption |
| presumption | corruption |
| consumption | insertion |
| assumption | assertion |

There seems to be currently only one "reverse" dictionary freely available on the Web for online consultation, at <http://www.onelook.com/reverse-dictionary.shtml>.

- [5] While specialized language thesauruses are outside the scope of this paper, let us note that there are several thesauruses of English slang in existence (Lewin and Lewin 1994, Green ed. 1986/1999, Chapman ed. 1989), though their use must surely be severely restricted.
- [6] McArthur (1986b) identifies several varieties of thematic presentation, notably
- travelers' phrase books, such as the topical Berlitz booklets
 - pictorial wordbooks, such as the Duden *Bildwörterbücher*, with an alphabetic index attached to thematically organized lists
 - specialized vocabulary lists arranged in topics or classes in language textbooks, an ancient lexicographical (especially bilingual) sub-tradition
 - individual innovative 20th-century works such as Bragonier and Fisher (eds. 1981) and McArthur (1981), and
 - elements within or behind alphabetical works which are either overtly or covertly thematic (e.g. grouped appendices in standard works, or whole volumes of classified glossaries such as Miller 1981).

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