

Aspects and Methods of Fictional Literature Knowledge Organization

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1. Introduction

Fiction retrieval has become one of the interesting special issues within information science during the past few years. This is a consequence of several facts. The most important of them is the need for fiction retrieval and secondly, the possibilities for creating retrieval systems for fiction have increased, due to the development of computerised environments for information retrieval. The multifaceted approach of analysing and describing texts, which is characteristic of fiction and its retrieval, has been made possible by this development. On the other hand, it has been discovered when computerising library environments that a great amount of the material within libraries has remained unindexed during the years of paper catalogues - and most of that unindexed material has been and still is fictional.

Also the gradual shift to the digital distribution of information requires new tools for analysing the contents of fictional material as well as indexing it. This is due to the fact that texts and other material that have not been analysed and classified and/or indexed in full text databases are hard to retrieve. Thus, the distribution of this kind of information becomes very difficult, if not altogether impossible. Another reason for emphasising the need for content analysis of fictional material is that free text search cannot be used efficiently when searching fictional material. This becomes apparent if we compare it for example with the search and retrieval of natural sciences literature, where the text is usually very topical and unambiguous.

The most valuable influence on the information science of studying the analysis of fictional texts and the information dissemination process of fictional works is that it challenges the traditional theoretical models and thus tests and expands the theoretical tools and concepts of this field of research. (See, e.g., Beghtol 1994b and 1997 ; Green 1997.)

In this article the methods and tools for fiction knowledge organization are evaluated as well as studies on the content representation of fiction are reported.

2. Classification and Indexing of Fiction

Studies concerning fiction indexing and classification are sometimes very difficult to separate because of the nature of fiction: it consists of several meaningful facets, and indexing or classification schemes become thus multifaceted. And even more, some classification schemes use in fact keywords as class notations.

One of the main interests in fiction indexing and classification studies has been to find out those aspects that are worth indexing and/or classifying in individual works. Traditionally the general classification systems have presented as these aspects the literary kind (specifically genre), the year of publication (sometimes with the reference to an epoch) and the country of publication and/or the writer (sometimes with the reference to cultural regions). Some classification schemes have later on expanded to include some specific classes with regard to subject matter. These have remained the basic facets used by the main classification systems (see e.g. Beghtol 1989 and 1990). The literary kind, time of publication and geographical region are useful bases for classification. They act according to the tradition of historical linguistics classifying languages and literature. They are also objective grounds for classification. However, these classifications leave the idea of describing the subject content of fiction - what the fiction is about - untouched.

The studies on the classification of fiction can be divided into two categories - those that discuss the shelf classification of fiction and those that see the classification as a means for the content description of fiction.

Historically we can separate three different ways of providing shelf classification of fiction. The oldest and most used one is to separate a few well-known genres from the rest of the fiction stock. Usually these genres are also the most used ones in a library. Thus e.g. detective novels are used as a shelf class nearly in every public library. (Harrell 1985, 14; Juntunen & Saarti 1992, 108.) The second step in shelf classification is to separate popular fiction from the fiction stock and arrange it according to genres (see e.g. *Alternative arrangement* 1982, 75-76).

The third and the most challenging way are to try to classify the whole fiction stock. Here we can find two different approaches. In one the whole stock is divided into classes without the distinction to recreational and serious fiction (see e.g. Burgess 1936 and Saarti 1997). In the other model the fiction stock is firstly divided into two main classes - recreational and serious fiction - and those main classes are the divided into subcategories (see e.g. Spiller 1980, 241).

Fiction classification studies have, on the other hand, emphasised the fact that the content description of fiction is in its nature multifaceted. Thus Beghtol states in her study on the different fiction classification schemes: "Characters, Events, Spaces and Times may be taken as fundamental data categories for fiction" (Beghtol 1994a, 157). Pejtersen (Pejtersen & Austin 1983 and 1984) made the same kind of notion in her empirical study on the basic aspects that patrons use while searching fiction for themselves. Pejtersen's studies implicate also that indexing and classification - especially when speaking of fiction - are merging into holistic schemes where classes are described by indexing terms and visa versa. Especially user-friendly systems such as Pejtersen's BookHouse, have used this type of classification with indexing terms as class notations.

Previous studies on fiction indexing can be divided into two categories. The first one consists of

those that discuss fiction indexing and the principles behind it on the general level⁴. The second one includes those that deal with the making of book indexes. The studies on book indexes are mostly carried out in Anglo-American countries with a long tradition of book indexes.

Papers on the general principles behind fiction indexing have been written besides Anglo-American countries in the Nordic countries, especially in Denmark. These studies discuss among other things the management of the complexity of fiction in indexing, as well as the concept of aboutness in fiction retrieval (Andersson & Holst 1996, Beghtol 1992, Bell 1991, Pulli 1992, Ranta 1991). Close to these studies are also those that discuss the possibilities of creating AI systems for fiction, because those systems are basically built upon indexes (Rich 1979 and 1986). Furthermore, there are several reports on the experiments of fiction indexing in various libraries (e.g., MacPherson 1987, on making children's literature indexes in school environment).

3. Aspects of Fiction Content Description

Ranta makes a distinction between two basic kinds of elements to be indexed in fictional works - denotative and connotative. Denotative or factual elements consist of facts in fictional works, such as the setting, personae and factual elements of the plot. Connotative or imaginative elements consist of elements interpreted from fictional works, e.g. the theme and its interpretation and issues on the expressional aspects of the work of art. (Ranta 1991, 20-23.) Ranta uses Shatford's distinction in indexing photographs, based on Panofsky's theory. Shatford divides the meaning into two categories, the factual and expressional ones. The difference between the two is that the factual meanings are objective while the expressional meanings are subjective. "The former describes what the picture is *Of*, the latter, what it is *About*." Thus, the indexing of the factual meanings is far easier than that of the expressional meanings. (Shatford 1986, 42-50.)

It has also been typical of the traditional classifications of fiction to have a very theoretical manner, especially of the traditional denotative classification systems. They are mainly built on the tradition of the historical linguistics from the romantic era and on educational ideology². So in them the needs of the users are ignored. This was one of the reasons why Pejtersen carried out her study in Danish public libraries to find out what the users wanted to be classified/indexed from the novels. As a result, she divided the questions of the users interviewed into four categories: subject matter, frame, author's intention and accessibility (Pejtersen & Austin 1983, 234).

Pejtersen's categories can be divided into a denotative one (subject matter and frame) and a connotative one (author's intention). Furthermore she has included aspects that are usually left to the cataloguing of the books in the group accessibility (e.g., physical characteristics). This shows that a system for fiction, created according to the reader's wishes is multifarious and includes both: aspects that are easily recognisable and traditional, as well as aspects that are unfamiliar to the present systems of classifying and indexing (e.g., valuing). Pejtersen's results also indicate that the clear division between cataloguing and classifying/indexing is of no importance to the users - it is in their interest to find out the things they need as easily as possible. Thus Green states that the indexing terms of fiction should be divided into two categories - subject terms and attribute terms. The former ones are those "that reflect what a document or a user need is about." And so: "This leaves attribute indexing to reflect such other characteristics of documents and user needs as language, regency, author affiliation, intended audience, and so on." (Green 1997, 86.)

The most problematic aspect in Pejtersen's scheme is the author's intention because it is from the indexer's point of view based on interpretation. This is especially true in the case of emotional experience that does not belong to the work itself but to the reader³. The author's intention category

is also problematic because it is difficult if not altogether impossible to find out in the work of art what the author's intention actually has been. And, in addition, as Wellek and Warren mention, the author can misinterpret his or her own intention: "It happens to all of us that we misinterpret or do not fully understand what we have written some time ago (Wellek & Warren 1980, 148)." Furthermore in order to define the author's intention we would have to ask the authors - which is very difficult, time consuming and in many cases already impossible.

Andersson and Holst made modifications to Pejtersen's classification in their study, which was based on interviews of 100 users in two Swedish public libraries. Afterwards they analysed the achieved descriptions of the novels' plots and compared them with the library's indexes. (Andersson & Holst 1996, 88.) Their model included the following categories: phenomena, the frame and the author's intention.

Swedish researchers have added to Pejtersen's categories some important aspects that belong to fictional communication. These are, e.g., a borrowed motif, a subtler analysis of the phenomena of fictional works and modifications as well as additions to the author's intention category, in which they have used a more neutral idea of message and added the reader's experience.

It is interesting to find out that the categories above do not include one essential aspect of an aesthetic object: the aesthetic and/or moral value of the work. One reason for this is, of course, that valuing is usually very subjective and thus badly fits to the traditional neutral values of indexing and classifying works. On the other hand, when the valuing of a work of art is left out, one, maybe the most important aspect of an aesthetic object, is left out. It also seems that users want valuing of works of art. This can be seen, e.g., in marketing, criticism and different kinds of prizes and competitions in literature and other arts.

It can also be seen that the aspects to be indexed/classified are limited mostly to those that are as objective (denotative) as possible. Of course Pejtersen as well as Andersson and Holst have added a few mutable/fuzzy categories that are based upon the readers' experiences. What is altogether omitted from the categories mentioned above is the history of different interpretations of a work of art as well as its position in the literary-historical continuity. This fact could be interesting and clarifying in some cases. Also the author and the role of the author have a secondary role in the categories. On the other hand this tells us that we must make clear definitions what aspects are worth indexing in fictional works. In addition, it clearly indicates that the systems for indexing fiction are utterly dependent on the environment they are created for⁴.

We can see from the schemes described above that the traditional fiction indexing is mainly based on the factual aspects. According to Nielsen they should be extended to the aspects of thematical factors, as well as to the aspects of the narrational structures. This is needed because in modern and post-modern fiction the main point is how it is told and not what is told. The third aspect that Nielsen emphasises while improving fiction indexing is the cultural and historical facts that have affected the work, e.g. artistic schools and cultural periods. (Nielsen 1997, 171-180, see also Negrini & Adamo 1996 where there is a more precise analysis of the literature domain).

4. Development of Fiction Thesauri

The thesauri and subject heading lists for fiction have mainly evolved from the needs of individual libraries and/or as a result of one person's initiative. At first they have been mostly simple word-lists or general thesauri/subject heading lists that have been supplemented with terms for fiction. Based on these experiments the subject heading lists and fiction thesauri have evolved in order to enable

unity of indexing and centralised cataloguing services. (Pulli 1992.) In Nordic countries there is a project is going on, based on the ideas of the BookHouse concept. Its main objective is to enable the dissemination of the cataloguing data of fiction between the Nordic countries (Pejtersen & al. 1996, 75).

In the United States the development started in the national level when the American Library Association's Subject Analysis Committee published their *Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama etc.* In the guidelines the committee recommend that the aspects to be indexed from fictional works be: form/genre, persons, setting and topics. Based on this recommendation and on the 23-page supplementary word list for the Library of Congress Subject Headings, a project was started in the year 1991, when ten libraries began to index fiction. In addition to that, Olderr has made a broader supplementary list of fiction subject headings to the LC thesaurus (Young 1992, 89-94.) The first edition of Olderr's fiction subject headings was published in 1987 and as a thesaurus in 1991. It includes terms from six different categories: topics, genres, geographical settings, chronological settings, characters and treatment (of the theme). The latter are terms that describe the genre of the work more specifically. (Olderr 1991, ix-xx.)

In Sweden the largest thesaurus is Jansson's and Södervall's *Tesaurus för indexering av skönlitteratur* (Thesaurus for Indexing Fiction), which was published in 1987. It is divided into two parts - systematic and alphabetical - of which the latter is arranged as a thesaurus. In the systematic part the terms are divided into three main facets, which are setting (ram), persons (person) and subject (ämne). These are divided into subfacets so that setting is divided into time (tid) and place (rum); persons are divided into development (utveckling), social relations (sociala relationer) and profession/occupation (yrke/verksamhet) and subjects are divided into ideology (ideologi), action (aktivitet), nature (natur) and human body (mänskocropp). And as the editors say, the borders between different facets are not fixed and placing some of the terms only in one facet is based only to the principles of making a thesaurus, where each term can be placed only in one facet. (Jansson & Södervall 1987, 4-6.) In the Nordic countries several subject-heading lists have been developed based on the BookHouse concept (see the Pejtersen section above).

Also in Finland there were some experiments on indexing fiction by Finnish librarians and Finnish book traders before the *Finnish Thesaurus for Fiction*. They all used the *Finnish General Thesaurus* but found out very soon that it lacked proper terms for indexing fiction (Pulli 1992, 2-4). Based on the experiences of these pilot projects, as well as those of the Finnish project based on the BookHouse concept, the need for a centralised indexing service for fiction arose very soon. This service was needed because indexing of fiction is laborious in itself, and also, it lacks traditions and guidelines, including subject heading lists and thesauri to follow.

The Helsinki University Library - also the National Library of Finland - decided together with the BTJ Group Ltd to start a project in order to make a subject-heading list for fiction. The editing was started in the fall of 1993, and in addition to the editor, an editorial board was appointed for the project. The subject-heading list was soon changed into the form of a thesaurus in order to match it to the other thesauri published by the Helsinki University Library. The first manuscript was then tested in Finnish public libraries, and finally the first edition of [Kaunokki](#) was published in 1996.

The first problem in making a subject-heading list for fiction was the structure by which the terms were to be collected and organised. The editorial board of Kaunokki decided that the subject headings should be arranged in the [form of a thesaurus](#) and the organisation of the thesaurus should be made to follow the facets mentioned in the previous studies on the classification and indexing of fiction. In addition to that part, an alphabetical index of all the terms used was added to the end of

the thesaurus.

The [facets](#) used were as follows:

- Terms that describe fictional genres and their explanations.
- Terms that describe events, motives and themes.
- Terms that describe actors.
- Terms that describe settings.
- Terms that describe times.
- Terms that describe other, mostly technical and typographical aspects.

From the above-mentioned facets four - events, actors, spaces and times - are mentioned in almost all of the previous studies as the main categories of fiction indexing. Beghtol thus draws the conclusion that: "Characters, Events, Spaces and Times may be taken as fundamental data categories for fiction (Beghtol 1994a, 157)."

If we compare this Beghtol's list to Ranganathan's PMEST facets - as Shatford does in her system for indexing pictures (Shatford 1986, 49) - we can see that those are equivalent to her MEST (matter, energy, space, time) facets. Shatford makes in her system the decision to combine personality and matter facets to actors, and then she refers with the energy facet to what these actors are doing. In Kaunokki the solution was that terms that describe the genre of the fictional work correspond to the personality facet. This seems logical because the genre or the kind of literature actually describes the personality of the work and in fact determines many of the events, spaces and times used in a novel (see, e.g., Wellek & Warren 1980, 226-237 and Saarti 1999). The matter facet on the other hand corresponds to that of events and motives in Kaunokki and the energy facet to that of actors. By adding Ranganathan's Basic Subject (Ranganathan 1969, 200), one could also make the distinction between different types of fictional works.

In the group "other", mainly terms that describe aspects outside the factual text of the work were included, because they are regularly asked in libraries. These are, e.g. the previously mentioned aspects that are in Pejtersen's accessibility category (Pejtersen & Austin 1983, 234).

Already while collecting the terms for the thesaurus it was obvious that the context where the thesaurus is used plays an important role in choosing the right terms and the right depth of the terms chosen. A concrete example of that was the subject heading for the indexing of juvenile literature. They were included in Kaunokki, although they could have as well been published in a separate special thesaurus. Another problem was the environment where the thesaurus is to be used. At the very beginning the decision was made that Kaunokki is for public libraries. The result of that decision was that a great part of the terms that literature studies consider as important aspects of fictional works were left out of the thesaurus. One solution for this problem would be the *Thesaurus for the Literary Research* which is currently under preparation. In Italy there is already an example of this, *Thesaurus di letteratura italiana* (Negrini & Zozi 1995, see also Negrini & Adamo 1996, Aschero & al. 1995). In the second edition of Kaunokki (2000) this part was developed further. Kaunokki was also developed in order to make it a thesaurus for the whole fiction, i.e. literature, movies, comics etc.

5. Information Process of Fiction

The main actors in the information process of fiction are: the work of art, its creator (i.e. the writer), the reader and the social-historical environment where the publishing and reception takes place (see

[Fig.S1.](#)). Because of the nature of fictional works the reception of the work of art is not fulfilled unless all the actors previously mentioned take place in the process. The role of the writer is to write works of art - novels, short stories, poems, plays - to be published. The role of the work of art is to be a medium by which the artist can communicate with his/hers audience. Also the work of art has its own, autonomous life: after the book is published the writer can only have a role as one on the readers, i.e. the interpreters of the work.

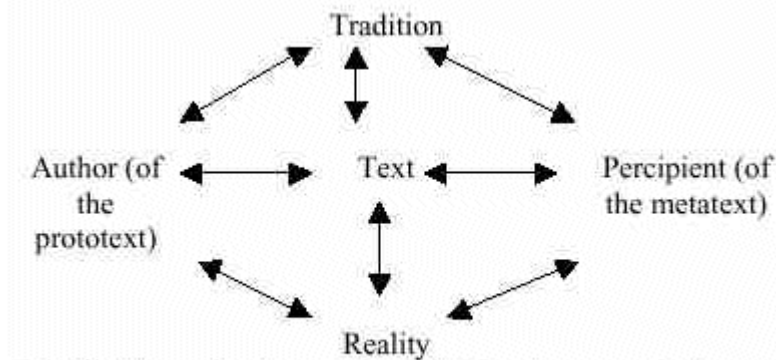


Fig. S1. The main elements in the fictional communication (Beghtol 1986, 93).

The role of the reader is that of the interpreter of a work of art. The interpretation as well as the creation of a work of art takes place in a social-historical context that defines the language used and its means of artistic expression. Without this common language the communication between readers and writers could not take place.

What is also typical for fictional communication is that it is twofold. It consists of factual meanings, i.e. references to actual happenings, historical and geographical facts etc (see e.g. Ranta 1991, 20-23) and on the other hand, it has an aesthetic function and is thus based on the individual interpretation and reception. That has an effect to the content description of fiction: on the one hand objective grounds can be found for it and on the other hand, some aspects are subjective and thus personal and diverse. In Saarti's study where test persons indexed and abstracted novels this was apparent. The indexing was found out to be very inconsistent (Saarti 2002) and one could typify the abstracts in the following categories (Saarti 2000):

- Abstracts that describe the structure and content of the novel (plot/thematical abstract).
- Abstracts that describe the position of the novel in its writer's history of works or describe the novel's position in the literary canon (cultural/historical abstract).
- Abstracts that describe the reading experience.
- Critical abstracts.

6. Conclusions

One apparent result of studies on indexing and abstracting of fictional works is the effect the interpretation of the work of art has on the content description of the works. Altogether this indicates the importance of the tools for librarians and patrons, with the aid of which one can control the content as well as the vocabulary used in the indexing of (fictional) works. That interpretational aspect of content description is of course a subject for further studies, not only for fictional works but scientific material as well.

It is apparent that not only the indexing and classification but also the fiction search and retrieval systems have to become many-sided in order to meet the different needs of the users. In [Fig.S2](#), a model for a search and retrieval system of fiction is given. It consists of five main blocks (databases) that represent the different actors of the fictional communication system - works of art (texts), their subject indexing and abstracts, history of the reception by the readers, history of the writers and cultural history. With the aid of this kind of a system one can document holistically the different aspects of the meaning of fiction, i.e. what the fiction is about.

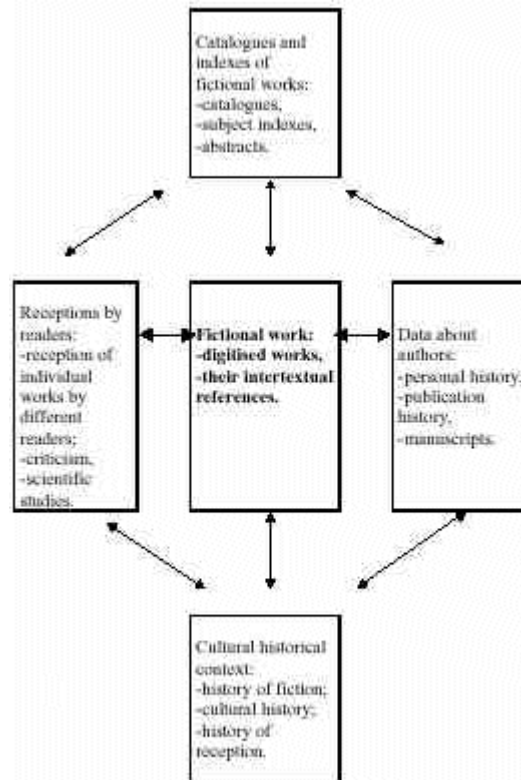


Fig S2 A broad model for a search and retrieval system for fiction (Smarr 2000).

Additional studies are needed in order to further develop the indexing and classification of fiction. One important topic is the effect of the environment on indexing and use of indexes, which is also crucial to the relationship between centralised and local indexing. Furthermore, democratic indexing in different libraries - a model that enables the users to join indexing - requires more investigation. This could be one model with the aid of which we could take along the interpretations and receptions by different individuals into our information systems (see Hilderley & Rafferty 1997 and e.g. the development in the search and retrieval systems of the Internet book-stores).

The widest field of additional studies consists of building up special information systems for fiction. One model could be that of the commercial solutions for different kinds of fictional material (e.g., Cinemania) and another, the systems made for library environments (e.g., BookHouse).

Also cultural and functional aspects are important both from the scientific and practical viewpoints. E.g. in Finland the feedback from the libraries helped in the preparation of the second edition of the Kaunokki. Kaunokki has also been translated into Swedish under the title *Bella* (1997), which gives us the possibility to make comparisons between two different languages and cultures. This multicultural point of view is especially interesting within fiction. A centralised indexing service

for fiction has been available in Finland from the beginning of the year 1998, which gives us experience from the benefits and drawbacks of a centralised service.

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Note

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Some of the studies on the classification of fiction can be seen as a part of these, especially the work of Pejtersen. Her BookHouse system is basically a mixed hybrid of indexing and classifying fiction.

2

See, e.g., Eagleton 1983. The very same educational ideology has of course been one of the main factors behind the mission of public libraries. See, e.g., Saarti 1996a, 22-24.

3

A fact that Pejtersen herself has noticed and made modifications to.

4

A good example of this is the aspects about the author. In a school library, facts about the author are very relevant for its users. Whether these facts are indexed or presented by other means in an information system is of course a matter that ought to be studied further.