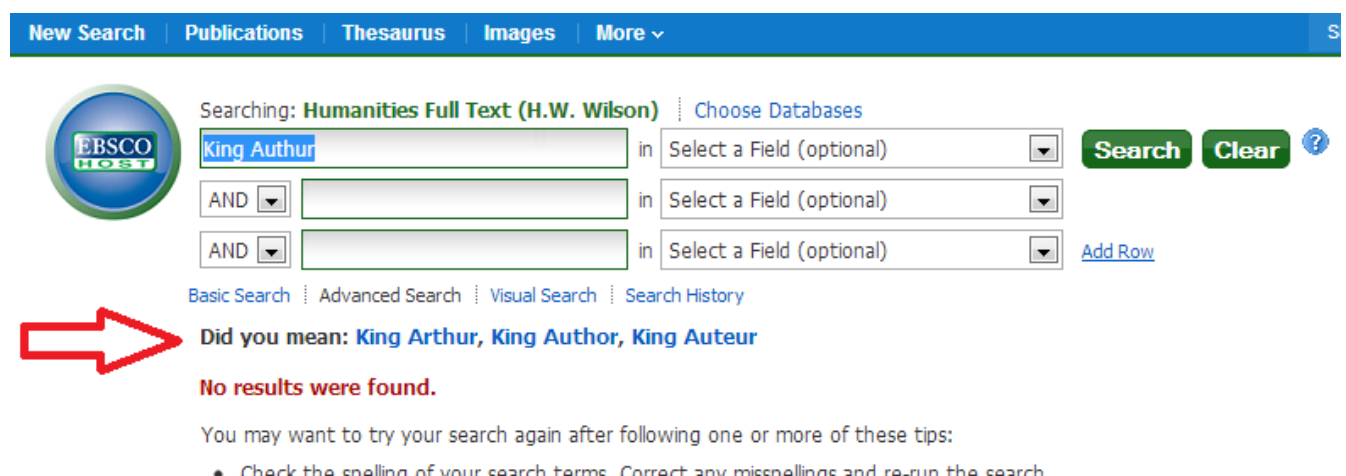Emily Brown

LIBR 247

Assignment #3

This evaluation will compare a commercial thesaurus-enhanced search system with a free one. The commercial system is Humanities full-text. The free one is UK Data Archive: Humanities and Social Sciences Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET).

Evaluation of Humanities Full-Text Interface

This commercial thesaurus-enhanced search system is accessed through EBSCO Host. I accessed it through San Jose State University's King Library system. This search system requires a secured log in with user name, school id number and pin. Choosing terms to add to the search statement is quite easy. There are three search boxes and you have the option of selecting the specific field to search in. The three search boxes are connected by Boolean search operators, and or and not. There is an advanced search option.

Doing a search for the term King Arthur got several result hits. I tried spelling Arthur wrong, and put in King Authur. I got no results but I did get alternative spelling suggestions, so that is something that an end user would find very helpful. EBSCO also had tips and a link to a hints section.

The thesaurus is available for browsing and searching, and is displayed alphabetically. The approved terms are linked in a blue font, making them easy to see. They employ a bold version of 'use,' making the approved term even more visually striking. There are tick boxes in the browse display and the individual term display. There are hyperlinks between terms in the thesaurus. You can select a term and then add it to the search using Boolean search operators. The system does provide advanced features like suggesting alternative search terms based on the structure of the thesaurus. There is also an explode option that is a tick box next to only some terms which also checks the select term box. I found the interface to be very easy for the end-users.

Browsing: Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson) -- Thesaurus

King Arthur   Browse

⦿ Term Begins With   ◯ Term Contains   ◯ Relevancy Ranked

Page: **Previous | Next**

Select term, then add to search using: OR ▾   Add

(Click term to display details.)

The term **King Arthur** would appear here had there been an exact match

    King's touch   **Use** Royal touch

☐   Kingdom of God

☐   Kings & rulers

    Kings & rulers (in religion, folk-lore, etc.)   **Use** Kings & rulers in mythology

    Kings & rulers -- Coronation   **Use** Coronations

    Kings & rulers -- Folklore   **Use** Kings & rulers in folklore

    Kings & rulers -- Marriages   **Use** Marriages of royalty & nobility

    Kings & rulers -- Mythology   **Use** Kings & rulers in mythology

I searched for King Arthur and while there was not an exact match, there was a number of related terms. Among the numerous related terms retrieved, Kings & rulers in mythology was one I

felt was most appropriate to the subject matter. Clicking on the term to display more, I see that there are scope notes, broader terms, related terms and used for terms. The scope notes and used for terms are in regular text. All the other terms have a tick box to the left and are blue links. Searching the actual thesaurus term, "Kings & rulers in mythology" gave several hits also.

Evaluation of UK Data Archive: Humanities and Social Sciences Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET) Interface

This free thesaurus-enhanced search system is its own page. It took a little while to find exactly where the HASSET thesaurus was located. Under the section Find Data, in the list on the left . It appears to be only searchable. There's a frequently asked questions or FAQ, section on the thesaurus. Also, in the right side there is a blue box with HASSET keyword search tips and an about page. Searching for King Arthur got no term and the thesaurus defaults to finding the keyword term that is contained in the word. The thesaurus gave me several related results, but the terms only contained the

keyword king. Baking, for example, showed up because the word king is in it. The results are displayed alphabetically, with no tick boxes. The two terms were split up, and while King got much more results, they were barely relevant to the search.

Searching for "Medieval King", it split up the terms. Clicking on Medieval history, the display shows synonyms terms, broader terms, narrower terms, and related terms. Narrower and related terms have tick boxes next to the heading, but no the actual terms themselves. There are hyperlinks for the synonyms in blue, and broader, narrower and related terms in dark purple. There is a button in the bottom left that allows for searching on the keyword.

Humanities and Social Science Electronic Thesaurus

Current term (Click the term for *KWIC* Display n)		
MEDIEVAL HISTORY		
Synonyms		
MEDIAEVAL PERIOD		
MEDIEVAL PERIOD		
MIDDLE AGES		
Broader terms	☐ **Narrower terms**	☐ **Related terms**
▸ HISTORICAL PERIODS ▸ HISTORY ▸ HISTORY AND ASSOCIATED STUDIES	▸ NORMAN CONQUEST	

Search on Keyword

Clicking the Search on Keyword button brings you to a list of retrieved articles. There doesn't seem to be any way of adding terms to the search except for adding additional terms to the keyword search in the thesaurus. There is no advanced search option. I find the interface to be a little difficult initially, but once you find the keyword search for HASSET and see what sort of results you get, it becomes easier to understand.

Evaluation of Humanities Full-Text Retrieval

I already searched Humanities Full-Text for King Arthur and discussed the results as compared to searching the thesaurus. Next, I will search for "world pollution". The initial keyword search yielded no exact matches, but they retrieved several similar results. Results are displayed 10 per page, and there are 61 results. The term is highlighted in the search results. It is hyper linked to the article

page, but not hyper linked to the thesaurus. The interface does allow users to browse through the thesaurus terms from the retrieved results, but they refer to these as subjects so that may confuse users as to their connection to the thesaurus. Additionally, you have to open a retrieved record to be able to actually click and search the subjects.

Comparing World Pollution to the thesaurus, there is no exact term match. It did not provide feedback on the terms not found in the thesaurus. Initially I searched by "term begins with", then "term contains" (a nearly identical list) which gave me the most relevant match of social problems. Then I searched by "relevancy ranked" and got pollution, which seems to be the most relevant. The interface does not exactly show how many documents have been indexed using the term entered, just results. The term Pollution has 25 results, when I search the subject. When I use the keyword search I get 439 results. The keyword search seems far more relevant to my initial search for World Pollution.

From an end-user perspective, the thesaurus doesn't do very much to increase usability or relevancy of the interface. The connection between subjects and thesaurus terms isn't spelled out, nor is it easy to switch between selected thesaurus term to a retrieved list of terms. I also never figured out, or found any information on, what the explode check box actually does. I think a good FAQ section, and being able to switch back and forth between the thesaurus terms and the subjects listed for the retrieved document would add quite a bit to this databases' interface.

Evaluation of UK Data Archive: Humanities and Social Sciences Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET) Retrieval

I detailed my search of King Arthur above in both keyword search and thesaurus searching. Next, I will search for World Pollution. The free text search gave me 15 results, some of which seem relevant. The display shows an unhelpful title, and a seemingly random excerpt from the document.

Sometimes that excerpt shows that the document has relevance, but the keywords are not bolded or made to pop out visually in anyway. The thesaurus keyword search gave me 9 terms from world, and 15 terms from pollution. There was no match. Looking at the selection, I think pollution would be the most logical term. Performing a keyword search from the thesaurus term Pollution, the results retrieved were 119, not many of which were immediately seen to be relevant to the keyword search. These are a list of studies found, and are sorted by study number with the first few lines of the abstract. The title is not always helpful, nor is there any subject terms listed with the result. The term is not highlighted in the results from the thesaurus. The term is not hyper linked to the thesaurus. Besides the default HASSET keyword search tips that are in the blue box in the right side, there is no feedback on terms not found in the thesaurus. The interface does not allow users to browse through the thesaurus terms from the retrieved results. It's not immediately obvious to the end-user how many documents have been indexed using the term Pollution.

HASSET thesaurus interface is difficult to use in some ways. One very annoying interface aspect is this: you enter in the keyword you want to search and hit enter. Nothing happens. You have to either click the button or hit it again. I just tried to enter in the search term and click the button. Nothing. You have to do it twice. This is an awful practice. The free text search could be improved by bolding the search term in the results. The thesaurus does not deal with small words well. Pollution and World worked out fairly well. There aren't many terms with the word World inside of it. As we discovered above with King Arthur, the word King is inside many words that have nothing to do with the term being searched. I think that's a major failing that this thesaurus would be much stronger for changing. I also think the interface could be improved if the thesaurus was browsable as well as searchable.

Comparison

Humanities Full-Text has quite a few differences when compared to HASSET. The thesaurus is browsable as well as searchable. Additional terms are easy to add to the search using Boolean search operators. In many ways Humanities Full-Text seems to be a better and easier to use thesaurus-enhanced search system than HASSET for an end user. However, I do have to say that it is much easier to search for documents from a specific thesaurus term in HASSET. HASSET also has a FAQ section that explains to the user how the thesaurus searching works, something that Humanities Full-Text would benefit from. Overall, I would say that while HASSET has some uses once you get used to the quirky keyword search of the thesaurus, Humanities Full-Text is a more relevant and useful to end-users.

Cited Sources

Humanities Full-Text database and thesaurus, EBSCOhost.

UK Data Archive: Humanities and Social Sciences Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET)
        http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/find/hasset-thesaurus