The BackBone Thesaurus (BBT):
Evolving a meta-thesaurus for the humanities through collaborative, distributed thesauri maintenance and development

BBTalk: A tool for federated thesaurus management

BBT in a nutshell

The BBT\(^2\) is the research outcome of work undertaken by the DARIAH Thesaurus Maintenance WG\(^2\) in an effort to design and establish a coherent overarching thesaurus for the humanities, under which specialist thesauri and structured vocabularies used across scholarly communities can be aligned and form a thesaurus federation. It aims at enabling cross-disciplinary resource discovery while ensuring compatibility with thesauri that cover highly specific scientific domains and areas of knowledge in development. It is constructed and maintained collectively by a distributed group of DARIAH affiliated organizations (AA,\(^3\) DAI,\(^4\) FORTH,\(^5\) FRANTIQ,\(^6\) ).

Methodological principles: The design of BBT

- BBT makes use of a small number of high-level concepts (facets & hierarchies).
- BBT facets and hierarchies were obtained through a bottom-up analysis of classificatory systems used by humanities researchers [Fig. 1].
  - Only the intensional properties of the specialist thesauri concepts were taken into consideration for the definition of BBT high-level concepts.
  - BBT concepts are completely disjoint from one another and are divided in:
    - FACETS: mutually exclusive high-level concepts that appeal to general categories of human perception
    - HIERARCHIES: stand in a hierarchical isA relation to their respective top terms
  - are differentiated among them by at least one salient intensional feature.
- BBT assumes an open-world position: facets and hierarchies within them do not exhaust the domain they classify.
- BBT is deliberately open to revision [Fig. 2].

BBTalk: A tool for federated thesaurus management

- BBT aims to bring together a federated vocabulary spanning the Arts and Humanities and to render them interoperable.
- BBTalk\(^7\) is an online service for managing thesauri integration with the BBT and updating its content, when necessary.
- BBTalk offers a thesaurus alignment functionality allowing end users:
  - create links among specialist thesauri and the BBT [Fig. 3].
  - provide evidence confirming/disconfirming the high-level terms of the thesaurus itself.
  - Clashes between BBT concepts and thesauri aligned to it can be resolved by updating the content and/or structure of the BBT [Fig. 4].
  - Updating the BBT involves the introduction of new high-level terms plus the deletion/merging or splitting of existing ones.
  - BBTalk keeps track of such actions and allows for version control.
  - Changes are implemented after careful consideration and discussion among the BBT managing team, until consensus is reached.
  - BBTalk supports discussions among end-users and its managing team [Fig.5].
  - BBTalk supports multilingual content.
  - BBT content is now available in English, French, German and Greek.


\(^{7}\)https://www.backbonethesaurus.eu/BBTalk/