From Bosseln to Tamburello
a German-English Sports Thesaurus

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Abstract

Sports collections are popular and their numbers are growing. Many sports associations and clubs have opened their own museums, but so far there has been little development of sports specific terminologies. Therefore, when adidas set up professional collection management for its historic objects, one of the first tasks was the development of a comprehensive English-German sports thesaurus.

There were many hurdles in the process of the thesaurus' development. The first was the definition of sports: Should chess be included? What about Pilates? Dog racing?

As no English-German sports compendium existed, information and translations had to be researched from many different sources. But none of these sources would tell us how translate regional sports like the German 'Bosseln' or the English 'Square Dance'. How should we deal with 'false friends', homonyms like 'wrestling', which have different definitions in English and in German? What about the term 'football' which is used differently in America, Australia, Ireland and Europe?

The outcome is a bilingual thesaurus with 2000 different sports from Abfahrt (downhill skiing) to Zweier ohne Steuermann (Coxless pair). Every sport has an English and a German descriptor as well as additional related terms in both languages. It has been used successfully in object documentation for the last five years.

Keywords: sport, museum, controlled vocabulary, thesaurus, German, English, bilingualism, translation, thesaurus development

Developing a German-English sports thesaurus

The existing standards[1] and books[2] can only partially prepare for the task of building comprehensive bilingual vocabulary. The following example of a German-English sports thesaurus will share some of the questions and difficulties that can come up during its construction.

When adidas introduced professional database management for its historic collections in 2009 it was decided to construct an own extensive sports thesaurus after it became apparent that a simple word list of different sports was not sufficient for specific documentation. Also, existing vocabularies such as the Art and Architecture Thesaurus[3] did not include enough necessary terms. This sports thesaurus was bilingual from the start to allow both indexing by the collection team as well as future retrieval of information in web-based databases by an interested international audience.

Apart from the question of translation, a bilingual thesaurus has many of the same challenges as a monolingual one: Which sources to use? Which terms to include? How to structure the terms sensibly?

The source situation proved difficult. There were no comprehensive sports dictionaries, let alone English-German ones, they only ever covered parts of the topic[4]. Therefore both research and translation proved difficult and time-consuming.

The project was started by compiling an extensive list of all sports that could be found both in the various dictionaries as well as in internet sources such as Wikipedia. These

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1   Such as ISO and American Standards: ISO 25964-1: 2011 which replaced ISO 5964 and ISO 2788 as well as ANSI/NISO Z39.19
2   Such as Aitchinson, Gilchrist, Bawden, Thesaurus construction and use or Wersig, Schuck-Wersig, Thesaurus-Leitfaden
3   AAT by the J. Paul Getty Trust; www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/index.html
4   Such as Rosenstein's sport dictionaries, Liponski's world sports encyclopdia and The Sports Book in English and German version

terms were then checked for relevance, verified, translated and put into a detailed structure. Usually a term needed to be verified by two reliable sources such as dictionaries or sports association websites, but in a few cases more than one could not be found. In the end, both English and German descriptors as well as possible alternate terms were imported into the thesaurus software[5].

Rare sport disciplines in the adidas collection made the development of a sports thesaurus necessary: ice-sailing

Deciding which terms to include in the thesaurus was a big challenge. Is *chess* a sport? If so, are *computer games* sport? And if chess is not included, what do you do about *chess boxing* where you alternate *boxing* with playing *chess*? In the end, the term *sports* was defined rather loosely and *Scrabble* and s*ack race* are now between *handball* and *swimming.*

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5 The software used was the Thesaurus Manager of TMS. TMS is a museum collection management program by Gallery Systems (http://www.gallerysystems.com/)

Another challenge was finding a structure for *combined events. Triathlon*, for example, consists of three sports, which belong to different categories: *running* (which is part of *track and field*), *swimming* (which is part of *water sports)* and *cycling*. The monohierarchical structure of the software did not allow individual terms to have two or more parent terms. In the end, all combined events that could not be put into one existing category went into the new category c*ombined events.*

Also the bilingualism posed its problems. Translation was difficult in general because of the lack of German-English sources. In addition, there were cases where there was no translation possible as the sport only exists regionally, like *Bosseln*. In those cases it was not attempted to generate a new term such as s*treet bowling (Northern Germany)*; instead, the existing term was taken for both languages.

So-called 'false friends' – words that are similar in different languages, but which have different meanings – make data input and retrieval more complicated. The English term *wrestling* is *Ringen* in German, but the term *wrestling* also exists in German. It translates to *professional wrestling* in English: staged fights for entertainment purposes. To avoid ambiguities in search, either the hierarchy of the term or a language specifier has to be included.

So far, *football* is probably the most used term in the thesaurus. At the same time it is one of the most complicated. What is *football*? It is a completely different game whether you ask Americans, Australians, Irish or Germans. In the end, we included the term *football* as a synonym for *soccer* as it is what most people worldwide would expect. For American, Australian or Gaelic football, people have to search for the respective compound word.

The thesaurus currently contains almost 2,000 different sports with both English and German descriptors and more than 1,200 alternate terms. After being in use for five

years, it has proved suitably structured and complete. Only a handful of terms had to be added in the meantime. Nonetheless there is room for improvement. For one, definitions and sources were not originally included in the thesaurus. They should be added and updated to include more recent sports literature[6]. Polyhierarchy would allow better accessibility of terms such as triathlon.

To improve the general quality of the thesaurus, specific parts such as martial arts should be checked by sports specialists for gaps and inconsistencies. Also it would be helpful to have the translations checked by a native English speaker with good knowledge of German to make sure that the terms are not only correct English but also correctly translated.

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6   Such as Room, Dictionary of sports and games terminology, 2010 and Tomlinson, Dictionary of sport studies, 2010

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