

# Theory and Practice of Interdisciplinary Terminology in Humanities: First Impressions

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# Who we are?

- **Juuso-Ville Gustafsson**, MA, University of Turku (Semiotics, work period September-December 2015)
- **Aino Kukkonen**, Ph. D., University of Helsinki (Theatre research, work period November 2015 – February 2016)
- **Janne Vanhanen**, Ph. D., University of Helsinki (Aesthetics, work period September-December 2015)
  
- We are working as a part of the Interdisciplinary Term Project in the Humanities and supported by expert groups in each discipline
- Work methods – independent and group work



# Motivation & funding

- To preserve and enhance academic research done in Finnish
- To provide a working and user-friendly term dictionary suitable for both academic and more general needs
  
- The need has been recognized:
- Grant from The Future Foundation of Faculty of Arts of University of Helsinki 2015: enables four months of full-time term work (two research doctors) and organization of a seminar on the topic
- Grant from The Cultural Foundation of Finland 2015: enables sixteen months of concurrent term work (four researchers) and real interdisciplinary teamwork



# Goals

- To map and analyze common concepts of the humanities and document the results to an Open Access-database Bank of Finnish Terminology in Arts and Sciences  
<http://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Termipankki:Etusivu>
- A central form of teamwork is to draft definitions and explanations of the common concepts; mapping and analysis of current uses of the terms and their conceptual history; providing cross-references between different areas of research. Thus the project advances interdisciplinarity in a very practical way.
- The OA-platform Semantic MediaWiki enables collective writing and co-operative editing of contents.
- The larger goal of the project is to integrate the interdisciplinary termwork as part of the practices of studies, especially doctoral studies in the humanities.



# First Impressions:

The pros, the cons, and the open questions



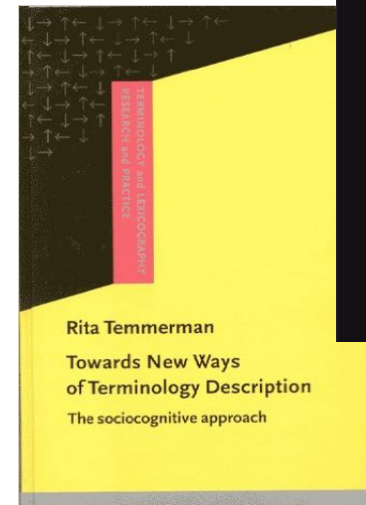
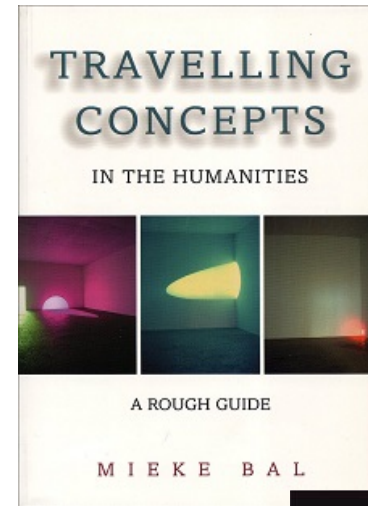
# Some obstacles from a coordinators point of view

- Possible difficulties in sourcing help from colleagues or experts at the beginning:
  - experts might not be interested
  - they are interested but don't contribute anything
  - they lose interest in terminology work, or are too busy to help
- Having to search key terms in wide research areas; lack of comprehensive dictionaries or encyclopedias in Finnish language in some areas
- Being publicly accountable for mistakes, controversial terms or definitions etc.



# Wider issues

- Not being an expert on everything in your field: defining terms that you know will be incomplete
- Knowing that terminology work can never really be finished.
- Initial results might give the impression that coordinators are adhering to a "quick-and-dirty" mentality
- Creating unintentional biases (either in the terminology section or the group of specialists)
- Learning by doing: not having a clear point of reference and/or
- Lacking theory – having only few literary resources available on this kind of work



# Positive aspects

- Getting to collaborate with colleagues from different universities and disciplines to discuss terminology issues
- Being able to use your own expertise and research interests
- Multidisciplinary term project has already proven to be a concrete and well-functioning way of collaboration
- A general positive attitude towards Term bank – the idea of "democratization" and popularization of knowledge
- You're able to know and demonstrate (with statistics) that your work is actually being used
- Satisfaction of watching statistics: also when the number of terms in your own area is growing





# More benefits

- The work is quite practical – everyone understands (for once) what you're doing
- The results of your work are immediately usable
- It's easy to justify the importance of terminology work and also to explain its reliability compared to other OA-sources.
- Learning by doing: creating new ways of working, freedom to experiment
- After initial startup phase expenses are reduce to a minimum and terminology sections become independent: terms are nichesourced from PhD students and specialists.
- The term work has more pros than cons!



# Open questions

From coordinator's point of view:

- What is the best way to start a terminology section?
- How much time is required for the first phase of terminology work? Is four months enough? What about a year?
- How to decide what terms are deemed as essential and what kind of terms should be left out?
- Standardization of terminology

Wider issues:

- Will universities include and commit to OA-terminology work and require PhD-students to produce definitions and explanations as part of their studies?
- How to secure the continuity of a terminology section after the funding ends?

