Michael Adcock – [adcockm@u.washington.edu]   April 9, 2008
TC 518

Preliminary User and Task Analysis: "TiddlyThesaurus"

Product Description

The TiddlyThesaurus is a web application which provides support for the creation of a thesaurus, and for use of the created thesaurus for indexing or searching. The tool was built out of a standard TiddlyWiki, through code customization and additions. It supports collaboration through a login system. It is primarily text based, and allows users to enter terms and related information, and indicate relationships between terms. Automated checks for broken links and other errors are provided. Simple change tracking history is available. The alphabetical schedule, classified schedule, and notation for preferred terms are automatically generated. Documentation can be added through the standard TiddlyWiki interface. In addition to the alphabetical and classified schedules, hyperlinks are provided to allow for navigation between terms. A simple search box allows the user to find terms, or content (definitions, scope notes, etc.) associated with terms.

Users and Their Goals

The primary user group is iSchool students at the UW, specifically graduate students.

They are likely to have the following characteristics:
- enrolled in the MLIS or MSIM program and meet requirements for LIS 537
- no prior experience with thesaurus construction or TiddlyWikis
- familiarity with web browsers
- working with a small group (3-4 people) to construct a thesaurus

Their goals in using the tool are:
- follow and learn the recommended procedure for creating a thesaurus
- focus less on the monotonous/repetitive tasks, and more on the difficult decisions to be made and problems encountered when constructing a thesaurus
- use the tool simultaneously with other group members, when communication between group members may be limited (in a distance/online class setting)
- simplify the managing of terms when compared with more manual methods like using Excel or creating and sorting Soergel cards

User Tasks and Procedures

The following tasks should be supported by the tool:
- setup and configure a "clean" (no terms) TiddlyWiki on a web server
- import a list of harvested terms from Excel
- specify term content (definition, scope note) and relationships (broader term, narrower term, related term, use, use for)
- identify/mark preferred terms and lead-in terms

- add/delete/modify terms as necessary
- identify facet structure; create node labels for classified schedule
- identify broken links or other structural errors in the thesaurus
- generate the notation for preferred terms
- write usage documentation for the thesaurus (audience, purpose, features, etc.)
- browse the classified and alphabetical schedules
- search for relevant terms
- print completed thesaurus (including both schedules and the documentation)

Context and Circumstances

The TiddlyThesaurus is accessed on a server through the user's web browser. All of the above listed actions should take place within the TiddlyThesaurus itself, and require no other software or tools, with the exception of the initial import from Excel. Since thesaurus construction in this context is a group project, it should be possible to perform these tasks at the same time that other group members are performing similar tasks. Care should be taken to discourage group members from editing the same term simultaneously, but the system should warn of such conflicts and not fail completely or delete content.

Criteria for Successful Interaction

The TiddlyThesaurus should be a helpful educational tool that aids a novice group of students wishing to construct a thesaurus.

Successful interaction could be assumed if:
- the learning curve is minimal – the students should focus on thesaurus construction and not on learning peculiarities of this (or any other) tool
- simultaneous modifications from different group members are permitted
- the users gain an appreciation and understanding of the approach to thesaurus construction
- the users create a structurally valid thesaurus useful for their target domain