

TC 518

May 14, 2008

Exercise 5 – Heuristic Evaluation: “TiddlyWiki Thesaurus”

Heuristic Evaluation

A set of criteria was designed to assess the TiddlyWiki Thesaurus (TWT) across the areas proposed by Nielsen and others, closely following the format of the Heuristic Evaluation System checklist credited to Denise Pierotti at Xerox Corporation. While our assessment included some generic usability questions, it was also intended to investigate issues specific to the design of the TiddlyWiki Thesaurus. The goal was to create an evaluation that balanced standard questions of web interface design with an investigation of some of the TiddlyWiki Thesaurus’s unique features. A future version of this checklist will be even more closely tailored to the TWT’s functions, and may feature revised heuristic categories.

Approach and Procedure

We recruited two iSchool students who had used the TWT for a class project during the fall of 2007 to serve as evaluators for this investigation. They were thus quite familiar with both the TWT application and with the methods and principles of thesaurus construction. They had not participated in any of our previous exercises or evaluations. We met with them on May 10th, 2008 in the computer labs at Mary Gates Hall. Two investigators accompanied each student evaluator, and each group of three conducted its session in separate rooms to minimize distractions. Both investigators in each pair took notes for the sake of consistency, to gather as much information as possible and to triangulate results. The evaluators were encouraged to spend a brief period re-orienting to the thesaurus, and were asked to perform the same simple tasks we had used with the participants in the cognitive walkthrough on April 28th, 2008. For the remainder of the sessions (approximately two hours) the evaluators worked through the heuristic evaluation checklist item by item, while sharing their thoughts and observations with the investigators. The team members wrote down their comments, took notes, and asked questions.

Outcome

If participants made similar comments about the application’s features or similar issues came up more than once in their responses, this became our basis for deciding what a significant problem was, and what was not. For example, problems with the meaning and location of the “close all” option were referred to several times by each evaluator, in the contexts of clarity, navigation and memory load. Other prominent issues include the following:

- There is **no “undo” button**.
- There is a **lack of documentation** or help.
- Important **information is hidden** or hard to keep track of. Some is buried in chunks of written content, as in the introduction. In other cases the minimalist style, absence of color, location of tabs and disappearing toolbars obscure terms.
- The alphabetical schedule has excessively **slow load time**.
- **Terminology is unclear**. In addition to confusion about the close/close all option, other confusing terminology includes “permalink,” “close others,” “done,” “permaview,” “view,” “jump,” “backstage,” “orphans.”
- The **position of some features/options** is unclear and/or illogical. This includes sidebars and toolbars, as well as options like “close,” “jump,” “logout,” and “status.”
- **Sorting of search results** is misleading; it presents results by alphabetical order rather than relevance.

The evaluators also made direct suggestions for revisions and additions to the thesaurus. These include:

- Collapsible terms lists
- Changes to the sorting/display of search results
- Providing more search methods of
- Linked A-Z list
- Mass deletion feature; otherwise terms must be deleted singly, by hand
- Detailed documentation for two sets of users, administrators and thesaurus builders
- The ability to open terms in new windows
- Revised names of specific functions (“tiddler” to “term”; “done” to “save”; etc)

Redesign Implications

A redesign of the TWT will need to address issues of navigation, documentation, clarity, error correction and skills. Based on the results of the heuristic evaluation, the highest priority items include the following:

- A set of user documentation will need to be created, for more than one type of user.
- Names of options (terminology) will need to be clarified and revised.
- Aesthetic and architectural changes to the interface will be required.
- Features may need to be added such as a mass deletion function, alternative search and display options, and collapsible terms lists.

Further Considerations

We would like to schedule additional heuristic evaluations with evaluators who have different areas of expertise. If possible, we would like to arrange for members of iSchool faculty to evaluate the TWT as a) a technical application, b) an interactive technology and c) a potential pedagogical instrument.

Heuristic Evaluation: TiddlyWiki Thesaurus

Clarity				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Does the interface make it clear when you have selected or deselected something?				
Are the phrases and word choice easy to understand?				
Are you able to easily locate the menus and selections you are looking for?				
Do the names of the commands indicate clearly what they will do?				
When you click on a tiddler or link, do response times seem appropriate?				
Is it clear what the sidebar features do?				
Are the "tiddlywiki" functions clear to you?				
Are the terms used in the menus consistent with terms used in thesaurus building?				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Consistency				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Does the layout of the application make sense with your understanding of how a thesaurus functions?				
Is the language of thesaurus construction used consistently throughout the site?				
Is the use of fonts and color internally consistent within the TWT?				
Is the use of fonts and color consistent with web page conventions?				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Help and Documentation				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Does the introduction to the TWT make sense?				
Does the intro information help you use the TWT?				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Navigation				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Is it easy to manipulate elements of the tiddlywiki?				
Is there any sort of undo method if you make a mistake?				
Is it easy to find your way around?				
Is it obvious where and how to make selections?				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Memory load				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Is the text broken up in a way that is easy to follow?				
Is the information you need placed where you are likely to be looking on the screen?				
Is it easy to remember the sequence of actions you must take to do something?				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Errors and Error Prevention				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
If something doesn't work, can you figure out why?				
Can you edit your work?				
Are there enough cues for how to accomplish goals or tasks with the TWT? (for example, adding a term, or looking up a term)				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Aesthetics and Enjoyment				
Is only information essential to decision making displayed on the screen?	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Is the layout and design visually pleasing?				
Are the “tiddly” features of the application attractive?				
Overall do you enjoy using the thesaurus?				
Did you find using the “tiddlywiki” features enjoyable				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Flexibility and Efficiency				
Do you think the TWT could be used by people with different levels of experience in building the thesaurus?	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				

Skills				
	Yes	No	N/A	comments
Is the operation of the TWT easy to learn?				
Could you easily explain how to use the tiddlywiki to another person?				
Does the set up of the TWT let you see relationships among terms?				
Does using this tool—to look up terms or to enter terms— help you understand anything about how a thesaurus works conceptually? PLEASE COMMENT.				
Please add any other comments not covered by these questions:				