

CATEGORIES (AND THEIR POLITICS)

INFO 300

Intellectual Foundations of Informatics

(For lecture Tuesday, October 29.)

READINGS ON CATEGORIZATION

Read the following articles by Bailey and Gould, and skim the article by Dumais et al. on categorization. As you read, consider the following questions: Why categorize? What's at stake with choosing one categorization system over another? For a given data set, can there be one "right" categorization system? Why or why not? In what ways, if at all, might user populations and context affect the choice of a categorization system?

Bailey, K. D. (1994). Chapter 1: Typologies and taxonomies in social science (pp. 1-16). *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gould, S. (1983). Chapter 28: What, if anything is a zebra? (pp. 355-365) *Hen's Teeth and Horses Toes: Further Reflections on Natural History*. New York, NY: Norton.

Dumais, S. T., & Landauer, T. K. (1984). Describing categories of objects for menu retrieval systems. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 16, 2 242-248.

READINGS ON THE POLITICS OF CATEGORIES

Read the following articles by Suchman, Winograd, and Malone. Suchman is writing in response to a piece of software developed by Winograd and others called THE COORDINATOR that was designed to facilitate communication in organizations in part by having people who used the system indicate explicitly (that is categorize) the nature of their intent (e.g., promise) for each document (e.g., email, memo) they generated. Note: Suchman positions her arguments in a good deal of social theory. I am less concerned that you follow the theoretical positioning of her work and more concerned that you get the general idea of what she is arguing.

As you read this set of articles, consider the following questions: What is the basic thrust of Suchman's trouble with the use of categories? Do you think there is a way around her concerns? What is Winograd's response to Suchman (that is, why does Winograd think there are good reasons to make use of categories)? Ditto for Malone.

Suchman, L. (1994). Do categories have politics? The language/action perspective reconsidered. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Journal*, 2, 3, 177-190.

Winograd, T. (1994). Categories, disciplines, and social coordination. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Journal*, 2, 3, 191-197.

Malone, T. W. (1994). Commentary on Suchman article and Winograd response. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Journal*, 3, 37-38.