BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Powering Search: The Role of Thesauri in New Information Environments. By Ali Shiri. Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 2012. Hardcover: 318 p. ISBN: 978-1-57387-454-0. Price: USD$59.50. Available from: http://books.infotoday.com/asist/Powering-Search.shtml.

Ali Shiri's comprehensive text *Powering Search* has done a remarkable job of consolidating research on thesaurus-informed search trends and practices, effectively bringing together examples and analysis from a variety of fields of study and user environments.

Each of the book's 10 chapters reviews research and trends in areas such as "Thesauri in Interactive Information Retrieval," "Design of User Interfaces for Multi-lingual and Meta-Thesauri," and "User-Centred Evaluation of Thesaurus-Enhanced Search User Interfaces." All the chapters provide rich reference lists, offering the novice reader an informed access point to the relevant literature. Indeed, the effect after completing a chapter is one of having just listened to an informative lecture – Shiri prefers to provide the reader with the breadth of the available literature on a topic rather than to argue in favour of a specific project or approach.

With chapters further subdivided into sections, some of which are quite small and specific, the reader is able to zero in effectively on information relevant to their situation. The chapter "Thesauri in Web-Based Search Systems," for instance, has separate sections on digital libraries, subject gateways, digital archives, and linked data repositories. The book also features a detailed index, extremely useful for locating information on a specific thesaurus. Although definitely reader-friendly, this is not a handbook on thesaurus construction, and anyone looking for "how to" information could be overwhelmed by the density of some of the discussions. That being said, the book does an admirable job of collocating guidelines, design principles, and construction standards, making it extremely useful for anyone looking for a solid grounding in the topic.

Throughout the book, Shiri makes use of several figures to illustrate his discussions, providing the reader with examples from a variety of search interfaces and thesauri representations. Although both the thesauri and the applications and visualizations depicted are drawn from a wide variety of sources, and would thus be of interest to those working in an equally wide variety of settings, many Canadian and many biomedical examples are used, making it very relevant to those working in the Canadian health information field. MeSH, unsurprisingly, is treated extensively. Platforms that will be relevant to many Canadian health library professionals are also discussed such as ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Ovid.

Another useful feature of *Powering Search* is the comparative tables such as "Key findings, problems, and implications of usability studies" (Table 8.2), where after discussing several separate usability studies, Shiri distills his analysis into a simple table that allows the reader to compare the findings of several studies quickly.

Although Shiri generally takes on the role of a guide more than that of a persuader, he does make one strong argument throughout – it is time to stop looking at the issue of thesauri and their implications for searching from separate communities of research, such as information architecture, library and information science, usability studies, etc., but it is instead time to unify the knowledge base. He states in his conclusion that *Powering Search,* "has taken a new approach to thesauri by critiquing the relevant literatures of a variety of communities who share an interest in thesauri and their functions but who are not, it should be noted, closely collaborating at this time [. . .]" (p.291), and this extremely laudable goal makes *Powering Search* an invaluable resource.

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