ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY ON USERS OF THE MACROTHESAURUS

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Introduction

In 1982, the ECLA Latin American Economic and Social Documentation Center (CLADES) prepared a survey which was widely distributed in the Latin American region and was aimed at collecting information to measure the level of use of the Macrothesaurus in the Latin American and Caribbean countries and at the same time to identify the problems experienced in applying it.

The initiative for carrying this survey out comes from a recommendation which emerged from the latest Technical meeting on Economic and Social Development Terminology: the OECD Macrothesaurus, held at CLADES from 1 to 3 July 1981.

This recommendation also expressed the concern felt by CLADES about the necessity for making an exploratory study since not much information was previously available concerning institutions using the Macrothesaurus in the region. It seemed indispensable to collect information which would make it possible first to put together a preliminary survey of institutions using this indexing tool and secondly to explore and evaluate problems which had arisen in its use. We have been fit to bring to this meeting in a preliminary and exploratory document, some of the information collected in the survey.

To carry out the analysis made in this document, some of the data collected was selected and grouped into variables so as to provide the processed information needed to explain and describe the use of the Macrothesaurus in the region.

We need however to clarify a few points before beginning to consider the data. First, there is the fact that many institutions which received the questionnaire distributed an undesignated number of copies, on their own initiative, to other institutions, preventing us from knowing exactly how many questionnaires were distributed in the region.

However, since 200 copies were initially distributed by CLADES, this is the number which will be taken into account in our calculations. In all, 137 questionnaires were answered, of which 105 indicated that the Macrothesaurus was used while 32 institutions reported that they did not use it.
It should be stipulated that some of the centres which said they did not use this indexing tool deal with documentation in fields far removed from economic and social disciplines, which might mean that they had received surveys distributed outside of the areas originally taken into consideration by CLADES, as explained above.

The variables taken into consideration for purposes of this document relate to experience in the application of the Macrothesaurus measured in terms of the year in which this tool first came into use; the dates of the editions used, the purposes for which they are used, an evaluation of the advantages and drawbacks shown by the Macrothesaurus in its application and the frequency with which new descriptors should be created to meet the needs of Latin American development. An annex contains a directory of institutions in Latin America and Caribbean which replied that they use the Macrothesaurus up to the beginning of 1983.

Analysis of some variables

For the purpose of making the analysis of the replies more valid, it was decided that the method of work would be to classify those institutions which replied affirmatively to the questionnaire in accordance with a criterion.

1. Distribution of the surveys by areas of development

For this purpose use was made of the categories defined by ECLA/CLADES "Informe de Diagnóstico Regional. La Infraestructura de Información para el Desarrollo: América Latina y el Caribe." In this document, information units were classified from two complementary points of view: First libraries and documentation centres were considered from the point of view of their capacity to respond to the needs for information on topics relating to the development of a society such as, for example, housing, public health and natural resources, and their requirements in terms of both scientific and technological and economic and social techniques and disciplines. On the other hand disciplines are also taken into consideration. When the two approaches (that of "development topics" and that of "disciplines") were combined, the result was a classification system of nine broad "areas of specialization", including:

1. History, international relations, geopolitics, geography, integration, projections, national security;
2. Public administration, political and administrative sciences, law, public powers;
3. Economic planning and policy, economics, commerce, international commerce, finance, public finance;
4. Social welfare, sociology, population, social policy, public health, social security, labour;
5. Education, communication sciences, mass communications, educational sciences, information and documentation, scientific policy;
6. Natural resources, environment, agriculture, energy;
7. Industry, business;
8. Public works, townplanning, transport, tourism, housing;

The replies received were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of specialization</th>
<th>Replies recorded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample analysed, the highest concentration of replies was recorded in the three areas relating to planning, economics, commerce and the like and in area 5, which refers to education, communications sciences and related fields, showing that these are the main areas in which the Macrothesaurus is used in the region.

2. Distribution of the surveys by country

As stated above, the survey was distributed in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Below, separate lists in alphabetical order are shown for Latin America, the Caribbean and international bodies, showing the number of replies received.
As may be seen, information was collected from a total of 20 countries, including 16 South and Central American countries and 4 Caribbean countries. The sample may therefore be regarded as being sufficiently broad to indicate that the problems pinpointed in the surveys are apt to be representative. Replies were also received from international or regional bodies.

3. Use of the Macrothesaurus

A total of 137 replies were received. Of these, 105, or 52.5% of all the 200 surveys distributed by ECLA/CLADES reported use of the Macrothesaurus. Non-use was reported by 16% (32 replies). These negative replies are, in general, concentrated in libraries and documentation centres working outside the economic and social field.
(a) Experience in the use of the Macrothesaurus

To measure this variable, the year in which the Macrothesaurus came into use was taken as an indicator.

We found it interesting to observe that a heavy concentration of replies relating to the inception of the use of the Macrothesaurus in libraries and documentation centres in the region is noted towards the end of the 1970s.

Thus, of the 83 replies received (19 surveys left this question unanswered), 63 indicate that this tool began to be used between the years 1978 and 1982. Only 23 showed that they began to use this indexing tool some time between the years 1972 and 1977.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/period</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972-1977</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data received</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, 59.6% of the information units indicate that they began to use the Macrothesaurus between 1978 and 1982, from which it may be inferred that experience in the application of this indexing tool is relatively new in the region, and this might be directly responsible for the comments made in the questionnaire with regard to the limitations of the Macrothesaurus.
(b) **Editions of the Macrothesaurus used**

It should be noted in the first place that since this is an open question, it elicited many replies in the questionnaire. In all, 116 replies were received since information units with more years of experience in indexing with the Macrothesaurus indicate that they have used two or more editions. Moreover double and triple replies were received in those cases in which information must be processed simultaneously in a number of languages. However, there were only one or two such cases so that their impact on the final evaluation is not great.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editions of the Macrothesaurus</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OECD 1979</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD 1978</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD 1973</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDBD 1974</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLADES 1973</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there is anything worth drawing attention to in this connection, it may be that of the 94 replies which indicate use of the Macrothesaurus in its Spanish version, 23 indicate use of very old versions which increase the difficulties of applying this tool. There might be any number of reasons for this; however, certain ones of them should be taken into account, such as the difficulty in obtaining foreign currency for purchasing this thesaurus, or failure to disseminate and promote this tool in the region, the difficulty which some countries experience in acquiring bibliographical material in the exterior, etc.

(c) **Purposes for which the Macrothesaurus is used**

One of the questions in the questionnaire refers to the use made of the Macrothesaurus in information units. This question also allows for a variety of replies, and therefore, more than 105 were received.

The replies were as follows:
For information analysis (indexing) 97
For selective dissemination of information 24
As subject headings 4
No information provided 5

(d) **Questions relating to difficulties in using the Macrothesaurus**

As one of the objectives of the survey was to measure such difficulties, the form included a number of questions which tackled this problem from different points of view.

The first made direct reference to whether the institutions encountered difficulties in the actual application of the Macrothesaurus. Out of a total of 105 replies 78 (74.2%) indicated that difficulties were encountered, and 27 (25.7%) that there were no difficulties.

The survey then goes on to categorize the difficulties from various aspects:

(i) Limitations in the coverage of the semantic fields for the indexation of documents.

(ii) Other limitations of the Macrothesaurus.

(i) **Limitations in the coverage of the semantic fields for the indexation of documents**

The survey contained questions for measuring possible limitations in respect of the semantic fields in the Macrothesaurus of concepts relating to Latin American and Caribbean development. In order to give more freedom in replying, there was an open question which resulted in a broad range of replies corresponding to nearly every subject area for development. The questions considered were those for which the largest number of answers was received. Then they were classified on the basis of the nine fields of specialization mentioned before. The replies ranged as follows: field 3 - economic planning and policy, economics, commerce, international commerce, finance and public finance - with 41 answers; field 5 - education, communication sciences, mass communications, educational sciences, information and documentation, scientific policy - with 32 replies and field 7 - industry, business - with 10.

All of them suggest the need for further development of the following fields as classified in the Macrothesaurus:
(ii) Other limitations of the Macrothesaurus

The survey also took into consideration other possible limitations of the Macrothesaurus which might make it difficult to use. Some of the limitations mentioned were that the tool is too generalized for the indexing of documents, that it does not suitably represent the development concepts of the Latin American and Caribbean region and that there are not enough scope notes and related terms.

To analyse these variables we have selected only those which seem to us to be of the broadest interest and in respect of which the greatest number of replies were received.

The first survey question we shall consider is the one relating to the possibility that the Macrothesaurus might be "very general", to which there were 47 affirmative replies, or 62% of all the 78 replies which indicated problems in the use of the Thesaurus.

The other variables which were taken into account are: the one indicating a lack of related terms. Here there were 27 affirmative replies, or 34.6% of all the replies received. It was also considered to be important to analyse the replies expressing the view that there were not enough scope notes. There were 27 such replies, i.e., 34.6% of all the difficulties noted, which, oddly enough, was the same percentage as in the previous case. In addition, consideration was given to three replies which indicated that the terms were inadequate for indexing concepts peculiar to regional development problems. There were 36 such replies, or 46.1% of the total. Finally, consideration was given to the replies indicating a need to create descriptors for filling the gap mentioned above. Taking the replies for two of the three levels of frequency considered in the survey (frequently, sometimes, never), the figures indicate that 67 of the 78 institutions (or 63.8% of all the institutions) feel the need to create new descriptors.
4. Preliminary conclusions

With regard to the findings obtained by conducting the survey, we wish to draw a distinction between two types of observation - those which refer to the methodological requirements for future investigations of the same kind and those which correspond directly to the use of the Macrothesaurus.

Both points of view will therefore be reflected in the conclusions and recommendations which we are attaching.

Some general characteristics of the sample

In the first place, we would like to mention two things shown by this preliminary analysis which might affect the value of the conclusions presented in the report.

In the first place, the findings obtained indicate that the Macrothesaurus is a tool which only recently came into use in the region, and this makes it difficult for the users to identify its advantages and drawbacks as an indexing tool.

In addition, a relatively high percentage (approximately 25%) of the users employ old editions of the Macrothesaurus, which might account for the replies containing negative comments and indicating limitations in respect of the controlled vocabulary.

These characteristics may indicate that in future studies it will be indispensable: a) to divide the sample in accordance with the editions of the Macrothesaurus which are being used for the purpose of distinguishing between difficulties which might correspond to limitations in the Macrothesaurus itself and those which might be due to the obsolescence of the editions; b) to divide the sample into time categories reflecting the experience acquired in the use of the Macrothesaurus (5 or more years of use, 3 to 4 years of use, etc.) so as to make it possible to incorporate this factor explicitly in the analysis of the problems presented in the use of the Macrothesaurus and thus to tell whether the problems which have arisen are intrinsic to the tool itself or result from inexperience in its use.
There follows a summary of the conclusions drawn with regard to specific points raised in this document.

**Validity of the sample**

The geographic coverage of the survey was sufficiently broad (20 countries and 4 international regional bodies) for significance to be attached to the findings obtained.

**Semantic fields**

The analysis of the survey gives rise to observations with regard to the need to expand some of the semantic fields in the Macrothesaurus. In this connection mention may be made of 02, 03, 04, 11 and 12.

We think that these suggestions should be seriously considered since a majority of highly representative institutions in the economic, finance and public and private banking and the whole range of institutions dedicated to higher education and culture have asked for the expansion of certain fields as a way of facilitating the indexing of the documentation under their responsibility. We would like to point out, as well, that the subject areas covered by these institutions fall into the social and economic field, core subjects of the Macrothesaurus. These suggestions could be indicating a limitation of the controlled vocabulary.

**Other limitations of the Macrothesaurus**

Some of the results obtained in these problem areas, such as, for example, the widespread need to create descriptors (74.2%), are closely linked to the point raised above. It is likely that if the subject category fields mentioned above were expanded, the need to create descriptors would decline notably.

On the other hand, the other limitations mentioned fairly frequently (34.6% in both cases) relate to the limited number of related terms and scope notes, which has a direct effect on the difficulties encountered in using the Macrothesaurus.

Finally, we wish to stress the preliminary nature of this survey and the advisability of continuing these investigations, taking advantage of the methodological experience acquired by ECLA/CLADES.
We believe it is of the utmost importance, as a first step in this direction, to make an exhaustive survey by country of the institutions using the Macrothesaurus.
Annex

DIRECTORY OF INSTITUTIONS USING THE MACROTHESAURUS

In this annex of the document, a list of the 105 institutions which answered the survey is given.

This may be one of the most important parts of the document since it contains the first reliable data collected concerning the users of the Macrothesaurus in the Latin American and the Caribbean region, although it is not an exhaustive list.

The institutions have been classified by country and within the countries in alphabetical order. A separate list is given of the international and regional bodies covered by the questionnaire.

It should be noted that the names of some institutions appear more than once; this is because different sections of one same institution use the Macrothesaurus for indexing collections of documents. Those institutions therefore answered the survey as many times as necessary.

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