Relating Universals and Particulars in the Humanities: Some points for discussion

Academy of Athens' Thesaurus Team

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Our contribution

- The Academy of Athens team provides content for the development of thesauri in the framework of the DARIAH-GR project comprising most of the Arts and Humanities subject fields (ANTHROPOLOGY, ARCHEOLOGY, CLASSICS, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE, LINGUISTICS, MODERN GREEK LITERATURE, MODERN HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, THEATRE & THEATRE STUDIES, TURKOLOGY).

- At the same time, the team provides content for the development of a registry of cultural collections (from museums, archives, research centres, cultural organisations, etc.) that uses thematic terms to allow information retrieval.

Emerging issues and problems

- Important terms cannot be included

- Temporal dimension in term definition

- Spatial dimension in term definition

- Differences of meaning of a term over time and across space (co-temporal)

- Relating persons to concepts

- Ambiguity: universals vs particulars/instances

- Dealing with the whole-part relationship by creating a parallel hierarchy

- Differentiation in the level of instantiation

Basic questions

- Does a hierarchy of universals always end with particulars?

- Is interconnectivity an issue?

- How do we deal with:
  - Spatiotemporal attributes as essential part of a definition
  - Relation between universals and particulars/instances in regard to:
    - Events (periodical, repeated, hapax)
    - Entities (persons and/or groups)
    - Titles and names (literary works, organisations etc.)
    - Currents (ideologies, artistic movements etc.)

Examples I: Epochs and Intellectual Currents

- The case of "-isms" (time and place)
  - Do "–isms" in art, culture, science and politics in general have instances or are they instances by themselves?
  - If they are universals by default, which are their particulars?

- Epochs > Artistic movements/ styles> **realism**> **naturalism**
  - Realism in art, theatre, literature, philosophy, critical theory etc.
  - Naturalism in literature, in theatre etc. as a reaction to Romanticism

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Examples II: Periodicity and Repetitiveness

- Periodicity vs hapax

  Cases of cultural, athletic or other events with periodical nature.

  The Epidaurus Festival, The Olympic Games, The Biennale of Venice or even the Eurovision Song Contest etc. should be considered as universals since they are instantiated every one/couple or so years.

  On the other hand, the French Revolution, the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment are instances!?

Examples III: Styles and Patterns

Several cases of styles and patterns are also ambiguous, as many of them have a strong spatiotemporal grounding (this applies to several different facets).

- <u>Epochs</u> > Artistic movements/styles > **Severe style**
  - Specific period and unique characteristics

- <u>Conceptual objects</u> > Symbolic objects > Alphabets > Archaic Greek alphabets | Epichoric alphabets > **Dark blue alphabet**
  - Type of alphabet with special characteristics & spatiotemporally determined

- <u>Conceptual objects</u> > **Dactylic hexameter in Ancient and Modern Greek poetry**
  - Shouldn't we indicate the distinction through spatiotemporal attributes?

Examples IV: Spatial and Temporal Continua

Including/ omitting time and place in a definition shifts from instances to universals? (this applies to several facets)

- <u>Groups and collectivities</u> > Tribes (group type) > **Tribe "X"** (particular – not applicable?)
  - Substantiation, instantiation or particularisation of collectivities? The relation between "tribes" as a term and tribes as entities

- <u>Conceptual objects</u> > Greek Language > Dialects & Idioms > Dialects > **Dialect "X"**
  - Description of linguistic phenomena and isoglosses/ geolinguistic continua vs. temporal & spatial attributes
  - Shifting from variation and understanding (definition of dialects and idioms) to separation based on time/ place/ ethnic groups (definition of specific dialects and idioms)

- <u>Periods</u> > History of Greek Language > **Different periods of Greek Language**
  - From time continuum to collection of phenomena. Main and important factor to describe and define historical periods

Examples V: Functions and Activities

- Using adjectives as parts of our terms

- <u>Functions</u>> Administration> **Ottoman** administration
  - The term " Ottoman administration" refers to a type of administration that lasted for several centuries. However, it is a spatiotemporally specified term and considered to be an instance (maybe because of the use of the adjective "Ottoman").

    On the other hand,…

- <u>Activities</u> > **Modern Greek** Literature
  - Composition of literary works (poetry or prose) in Modern Greek Language
- e.g. **Socratic** Philosophy

Examples VI:
Types and Variations of Material Objects

- <u>Material objects</u> > Mobile objects > Musical instruments > Stringed musical instruments> **Lyres**

  - Sub-categories and different types of the same instrument (spatial and temporal differentiation of the general object type)

  - Various names (terminology)

  - How should we make the distinction between these two contemporary variants?

  - How should we make the distinction between them and the ancient type, keeping in mind that all are called lyres?

Examples VII: Persons and Titles

- Specific literary works in relation to their creators
  - e.g. Homeric epics, Sophocles' tragedies, Shakespeare's oeuvre

- Persons/ Creators in relation to currents (artistic, political, philosophical)
  - Most philosophical concepts are differently perceived and defined by thinkers.
    - e.g. The concept of «Αγαθόν»: according to Plato and Aristotle

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Examples VIII: Whole-part Relationship

- The whole-part relationship and parallel hierarchies

Sentences (genre relationship)

    Main vs Subordinate sentences (nominal vs adverbial subordinate)

Sentences (whole-part relationship)

    Verb, Subject, Object, Prepositional Phrase, Predicate

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Conclusions

- Attempting a meta-approach of the project
  - Activities > Classifying Knowledge > Rewinding the questions and the issues

> Time and Space as attributes to conceptualisation of a term
> Red thin line: shifting from instances/ particulars to universals
> The two sides of the same coin (instance, particular)
> Interconnectivity

Thank you for your attention

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