

Language matters: A discussion of international differences in terminology and implications for indexing and tagging

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Use of words, differing meanings

"Lunch on your own": what does this mean? I first came across this phrase at my first SALIS Conference in 2003, and being English understood it literally (to have lunch on your own without any company), but then of course I realised that in the context of North America it means you have to pay for your own lunch! This demonstrates that although we share the same language there can be tremendous differences and misunderstandings.

Etymology and emerging concepts of addictions

For this panel I looked at the etymology of addiction – from the Latin verb "addicere" – to give or bind a person to one thing or another. The online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=addiction>) states "noun 1600, "tendency," of habits, pursuits, etc.; 1640s as "state of being self-addicted," from Latin addictionem (nominative addictio) "an awarding, a devoting," noun of action from past participle

stem of *addicere* (see *addict* (v.)). The earliest sense was less severe: "inclination, penchant," but this has become obsolete. In main modern sense it is first attested 1906, in reference to opium (there is an isolated instance from 1779, with reference to tobacco). Addiction is used ambiguously with arbitrary meanings and alongside other ill-defined terms such as habituation and drug dependence or drug abuse. Jenkins (1999) in "Synthetic Panics: the Symbolic Politics of Designer Drugs," argues that there are two issues with the term "drug abuse." He explores the issue that what constitutes a "drug" is debatable. An example of this is gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid, a naturally occurring substance in the central nervous system that is considered a drug, and is illegal in many countries, while nicotine is not officially considered a drug in most countries. The word "abuse" suggests a recognized standard of use for any substance. Drinking an occasional glass or a few of wine is considered acceptable in most Western countries, while drinking a bottle is seen as an abuse, and three or more large glasses in one session can be described as "binge drinking."

In the field of addictions there are differing approaches to the language we use, and the sector comprises medical, social, and psychological disciplines, which is demonstrated in its terminology. Berridge et al. (2014) explore the language of addiction and policy responses for two key periods, 1860-1930 and the 1950s and 1906s, and conclude that the language of addiction has been varied and non-standard.

Stigma associated with language

In the UK the term "substance misuse" is used more than "substance abuse," as the latter is considered to be more pejorative. Until recently, in the US the term substance abuse was more common. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, DSM-5, (2013), no longer uses the terms "substance abuse" and "substance dependence," but instead uses "substance use disorders,"

terminology which is considered to be less stigmatising.

A 2008 publication by the US non-profit organization National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment entitled "The Words We Use Matter. Reducing Stigma through Language" states that "stigma remains the biggest barrier to addiction treatment faced by patients." The terminology used to describe addiction has contributed to the stigma. Many derogatory, stigmatizing terms were championed throughout the "War on Drugs" in an effort to dissuade people from misusing substances. Education took a backseat, mainly because little was known about the science of addiction. That has changed, and the language of addiction medicine should be changed to reflect today's greater understanding. By choosing language that is not stigmatizing, we can begin to dismantle the negative stereotype associated with "addiction," as is shown by this excerpt from a 2014 blog post by Yngvild Olsen:

"I just want her to be clean," her mother said as I looked across the table at her daughter, the person who I had treated for opioid use disorder for the last year. That person, head hung low, was clutching her bag until her knuckles blanched.

It sounded funny, coming from an educated, relatively affluent woman – clean. It made it sound as if her daughter hadn't showered recently or was wearing dirty clothes. That didn't seem to be the case to me. I wondered what the mother really thought of her daughter and vice versa and what kind of relationship they really had. I wondered how I would feel if my mother said the same about me. "If I'm not clean, mom, then I must be dirty, and who wants to love or help a dirty person?" (Olsen, 2014)

The need to standardize?

Standardizing language and terminology in addiction is a matter that is highly relevant not only to addiction professionals, but also to those of us who work as information

professionals in the field. We have the task of using language effectively when indexing for information retrieval, thus ensuring that researchers and practitioners can find literature and resources easily and quickly. We need to be aware that language changes with new words coming in and others falling into disuse, or re-emerging. For example, the term “legal highs” is very much in use currently but has been around since the late seventies or early eighties and is a term now used to describe novel or new psychoactive substances or stimulants, along with others such as “research chemicals” “NPS [Novel Psychoactive Substances],” “designer drugs,” or “herbal highs.” There are differing definitions and views of NPS and discussions about which drugs can be considered as NPS (Goodair, Corkery, and Claridge, 2014; King and Nutt, 2014).

Developing an addictions taxonomy

ELISAD, the European Association of Libraries and Information Services on Alcohol and other Drugs, was funded between 2002-7 by the European Commission to develop and maintain an online gateway of evaluated websites on addictions. The team comprised 18 partners from addiction libraries and documentation centers across Europe assigned to select, evaluate, classify, index and catalogue internet resources for the gateway. Within this project the major challenge was how to deal with the issue of different terminologies, concepts and understandings. The approach in the first phase was to develop an English language list of agreed indexing terms, with definitions, to use when classifying and evaluating websites in order to make subsequent searching and retrieval effective. Being clear and precise in the use of language was essential as the taxonomy was being used by partners whose first language was not English, and this element of the project gave rise to many debates about the meanings of particular words and their use. In the second phase of the project a key aim was to update the

indexing terms and develop an addictions taxonomy for translation. This was done by analysing and mapping the free text search field to the indexing terms to identify how often a keyword was used as a measure of its continued literary warrant. This led to compound facets being developed to accommodate different ideologies across Europe, and written Scope Notes for the taxonomy were provided. The taxonomy was translated into 17 languages.

WP 4 Addictions Taxonomy	Develop addictions taxonomy	Systematic review of key words and indexing terms. Hierarchy of terms developed Creation of 13 systematic facets with 400 top/narrow terms. Scope Notes & contextual information written
WP 5 Translation	English language taxonomy translated into other European languages	17 language versions of the taxonomy 17 language versions of the website 17 version of promotional literature

This task was challenging both intellectually and culturally. Developing an accepted taxonomy which could be understood, translated and used requires patience, time and an awareness of the differing approaches to addiction across Europe.

Babor and Hall (2007) called for a consensus conference on alcohol and other

drugs terminology. Reflecting on the experience of the Gateway project I would argue that such an event could be productive in addressing the many differences in use and understanding of addiction language across the world. What we achieved in the Gateway project was not simply a set of agreed terms, but a far greater understanding of the issues faced by those in other European countries, particularly those whose first language is not English. As information specialists, we found our retrieval skills greatly heightened through a deeper understanding of the ways in which colleagues from other countries use

a particular term, and we can only assume that this advantage would prove even greater for those involved in research. This deeper understanding of addiction terminology is also useful when tagging blogs and websites, and for determining keywords when publishing in the academic literature.

There is thus a need for us all to work collaboratively towards the standardisation of our terminology to ensure that knowledge exchange and retrieval in the age of information overload is more efficient for all within the sector.

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