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Systems of Classification and Categorization as Revealing Tensions Within Knowledge

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Abstract: Knowledge organization systems are likely to reveal disagreements and controversies in the construction of knowledge. This article looks at the social tensions reflected in the use of terms such as "race" or typical expressions like "woke" or "cancel culture". It compares the use of these terms in the French-speaking world between Wikipedia and the Rameau subject headings. It first examines the operational functioning of Rameau's indexing language for libraries, then that of the French Wikipedia's categorization system, and finally explores their differences and similarities in the use of the terms presented.

Keywords: knowledge organization systems; Rameau indexes; Wikipedia

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1. Introduction

Wikipedia categories and Rameau subject headings are technical tools for the mediation and sharing of knowledge, accessible to users engaged in information searching. Rameau is a language used by librarians to index library documents, while Wikipedia's categorization tool primarily serves the content exploration strategies of the encyclopedia (Roszkowski 2017). These two knowledge organization systems can address similar themes. This article aims to compare them by first examining their operational functioning and then exploring their differences and similarities, using the term “race” as the starting point. Both systems reveal consensuses and interpretations that may lead to debate.

2. Description of the Issue and Methodology

Here, we reiterate the basic definition of Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) as tools to organize recorded knowledge resources. As a reminder, a knowledge classification system provides a conceptual structure within which relationships between concepts are identified, established, and recorded. From a praxeological perspective, it involves considering users' needs from diverse social groups, domains, and cultures, which implies adapting KOS to the represented knowledge (Sosińska-Kalata 2012).

Categorization and classification are operations that reveal presuppositions. How can categories be used without validating or reinforcing stereotypes and the logic of stigmatization underlying classifications (Martiniello and Simon 2005)? In 2007, Jonathan Furner used Critical Race Theory (CRT) to scrutinize bibliographic classification systems. Thus, the Dewey Decimal Classification and its 2003 revisions, which considered racial intermixing, have been evaluated to verify whether they better meet users' demands. However, “deracializing” Dewey

proved problematic for information retrieval, as recall rates indicated failures in document findability.

Recent studies have shown that while knowledge classification is inherently linked to social issues, it also presents an opportunity for epistemological teachings to consider ethnic belonging and diversity and to promote inclusion (Adler and Harper 2018; Birdi et al. 2022). Founding a theory and practice of knowledge organization on positivist methods, based on the assumption that it would be possible to establish 'groundless' classifications - free from biases or any cognitive prejudice, is an illusion that regularly manifests as an unattainable ideal of neutrality.

Firstly, we presuppose that Rameau indexes established knowledge while Wikipedia is better suited to index knowledge in the making. This might appear contradictory considering Wikipedia's rules aimed at cataloging legitimized knowledge; however, a form of social claim to legitimacy exists.

This initial study aims to compare the indexing and categorization terms used in the Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) Rameau and Wikipedia. We will analyze this from two perspectives: the organizing system and the user searching for information. Specifically, we will examine two types of indexing—documentary description and mediation (Cavalié 2019). It is essential to mention that we will not explore the automated processes of Wikidata, reconciliation between reference frameworks, or semanticization. However, it is worth noting that Wikipedia is created with contributions from researchers (Broudoux 2015). Wikipedia pages have a section at the bottom that can list links to library authority records (Rameau subject headings, Library of Congress, etc.) and identity repositories (VIAF, IdRef, etc.). This indicates that these two KOS are potentially interconnected and realized.

We will examine the similarities and differences between the Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS).

3 Choosing the corpus

We begin with the use of the term "race," which is a topic of debate in France, with the term "ethnicity" having been preferred at one point. A recent study in the field of Law lists initiatives aimed at replacing it within the French Constitution (Bessone 2021). Indeed, Article 1 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1958) states that "France is an indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic. It ensures equality before the law for all citizens without distinction of origin, race, or religion". Several changes have been proposed to replace the term 'race'; the latest (in 2018) would replace it with gender, resulting in: 'without distinction of gender, origin, or religion'. According to Bessone (2021), this could characterize a form of colorblindness. However, even if the word 'race' no longer refers to a biological reality today, it does describe a 'principle of vision and division of the social body', and as Bessone reminds us: "To remove 'race' from the law, on the contrary, is to deprive oneself of the means of explanation, visibility, and ultimately correction of these injustices" (381). The result is the risk of reinforcing social inequalities and injustices. We can see here that suppressing a term does not eliminate the problem but contributes to its amplification.

We are first interested in the use of the terms 'race', 'racialization', and 'racization', which we must first differentiate. As Colette Guillaumin pointed out, the idea of race is first and foremost a "given of nature," the belief that it is a category based on a material phenomenon composed of a set of physiological characteristics doubled by a set of social characteristics. However, Guillaumin (1992) shows that the "presumed natural" taxonomy, on the side of physical anthropology, does not always cover the social, historical, and sociological taxonomy of the notion of race.

Macé (2009) distinguishes racialization - as a process of assigning positive or negative attributes linked to a supposed 'racial origin' - from cultural racism represented by

ethnicization, constituted by “operations that reduce individuals, groups, and behaviors to specific cultural attributes to establish a hierarchy” (Macé 2009, 247). Macé also differentiates *racization* from racialization. Based on the work of Guillaumin, the author defines racization as a power relationship that opposes individuals in two categories: *racializer* and racialized. It is, therefore, a process of domination that organizes racization. This explains why political anti-racism activists self-identify as racialized, characterizing their experience within the group subject to the specific power relationship of racism. So, we have a first definitional distinction between the process of racialization, which is based on the attribution of real or supposed characteristics, and that of racization, which defines a binary relationship of domination.

We are also interested in classifying and categorizing the terms ‘woke’ and ‘cancel culture,’ which reflect societal developments subject to controversies.

4 Comparison of two knowledge organization systems

4.1 Organization of knowledge in libraries

4.1.1 Rameau: an indexing language

Rameau^[1] is an indexing language used by librarians to express the subject of a document based on the analysis of its content, with the aim that the end user can then access indexed documents through subject searches (subject access). It is a pre-coordinated indexing language consisting of a vocabulary of linked terms and a syntax indicating the rules for constructing subject headings for indexing. All authority records are based on a core formed of common nouns and geographic names. They are supplemented by an Indexing Guide to facilitate learning and use.

The institutions concerned by the use of this documentary language are the National Library of France, university libraries, public or research libraries, and private organizations. Rameau and all information intended to monitor the evolution of the language are presented and easily accessible through a website.

4.1.2 The Institutional Collective Authority of Rameau

As Amar (2000) emphasized in her work on indexing, the visible organization of documents on a library shelf masks the instability of traces. This apparent balance hides the permanent evolution, the differences in local appropriations, and the cooperative work that maintains the Rameau language.

While its use for controlled indexing reflects the social evolution of language use, Rameau is developed autonomously. However, it is always about the Subject Heading List of Laval University in Quebec and the Subject Heading List of the Library of Congress (LCCN). In France, user institutions (around 300) submit proposed modifications collected in the National Rameau Proposal File (FNPR), and a systematic vocabulary revision program is implemented multi-yearly. The proposals are processed by the seven managers^[2] of the national Rameau center according to their areas of expertise, and each one can be the subject of an exchange between the requester and the manager. The scope of action of the FNPR is defined according to the type of authority records listed in a document^[3].

Therefore, the choice of subject headings is a collective process that reflects the evolution of produced knowledge according to a documentary typology. The Rameau language can also reform itself, as it currently does, to fit into the rapidly changing informational environment of the data web. A working subgroup, 'Concepts, Places, Times', within the

Bibliographic Transition Standardization Group, works on it as a project with national governance.

4.2 Organization of Wikipedia pages

From an editorial point of view, French Wikipedia is organized into eleven portals and twelve projects promoting the themes covered in the encyclopedia. From a knowledge organization perspective, Wikipedia relies on a hierarchical system of categories that include each other. Each article containing external links can refer to authority records (BNF, LCCN, etc.). Page redirects facilitate navigation during consultation.

4.2.1 The categorization space

The classification of Wikipedia categories is thematic and based on a tree structure of categories, super-categories, and sub-categories, but the organization is also transversal with related categories. Each article can be classified into one or more categories, which themselves can belong to several super-categories or have sub-categories. The exploration of Wikipedia page categorization is done by directly querying their tree structure. For example, the category "racism" contains 25 sub-categories, and 194 pages use it.

To frame the use of categories, Wikipedia has conventions and rules, as for the entire encyclopedia. The category conventions^[4] list rules to follow: for example, the condition to link an article (or a sub-category) to a category is that there is a direct hierarchical link between these two notions. Chains of inclusion are formed when at least three categories nest within each other. The "Discussion" tab of the Category Conventions page reveals heated debates, such as the one on double categorization^[5].

A specific recommendation is to place a brief reminder on the subject of the category in the header of its page. Another recommendation is to avoid creating a category if there are not potentially a dozen articles to include in it. Similarly, it is advisable to reorganize into sub-categories categories that have several hundred entries. To maintain a high level of relevance, it is recommended to base the classification of an article in a category “on an uncontested factual element” (example: date of birth, nationality, laureate, or specific function) or “on explicit content allowing to source this connection”.

The help for categories^[6] specifies the presentation of a category page, the structure of the category network, and the various possible searches: tree structure, search, and the advanced search tool Petscan. It is a practical help, like a tutorial, that allows everyone to grasp a technique quickly. Note the difference with Rameau, which is aimed at indexers and has a real 270-page Manual (Bibliothèque Nationale de France 2014).

4.2.2 Wikipedia's page redirections

We are interested here in the page redirection under Wikipedia, which initially corresponds to several needs:

- when the title of a page is renamed on a wiki, the old page is not destroyed but becomes a redirect page automatically referring to the new one when it is called in a browser, allowing existing hyperlinks to continue to be operational;

- when the entered terms contain spelling mistakes or several possible wordings, redirect pages lead to the "correct" functional page (e.g., the term “*boudhisme*” redirects to “*bouddhisme*”);

- when the entered terms are synonyms, this avoids the multiplication of pages dealing with the same subject and edited in parallel.

It should also be noted that the redirection operation is invisible to the user; at most, they can see, at the top of the page that appears, the mention "(Redirected from ...)." This strongly solicits the encyclopedia in terms of the number of requests. Hill and Shaw (2014) measured the impact of these redirects on the work of researchers downloading a dump of the encyclopedia. By not taking into account the difference between redirected pages and target pages, some authors would be surprised by the low correlation between the number of edits and views.

4.2.3 Wikipedia's collective social authority

We are interested in Wikipedia's collective social authority, which is manifested through the Discussions on all Wikipedia pages: articles, categories, portals, projects, etc.

No category discussions were found for the terms studied in this exploratory study.

The Categories project reflects on methods of categorizing articles to improve overall coherence and to ensure the maintenance of category organization. It lists participants (WikiAnts) who organize and maintain the encyclopedia and its system. New categories appear on the project page as well as the objectives to be achieved. This window into activity around categories is of the nature of enunciative authority since the avatar-identities of the participants are valued there.

The “pheromone corner” hosts discussions related to the Categories project. At the time of writing this article, the eligibility of the article on “Category: Birth in the Third Reich” is featured on this page. This debate will result in the conservation, deletion, or merging of the article.

Decision-making (PDD) and polls go through discussion phases, which are necessary to proceed with votes. Polls allow Wikipedia editors to consult, but to interest them in the

discussed issues, it is sometimes necessary to go through the café, to make their stakes known, and to interest people who will join in their drafting.

5 Comparative Study

5.1 How Rameau and Wikipedia deal with the notion of Race

By querying Rameau from the BNF catalog, the subject heading “rade” is defined: “Under this heading, one finds documents on the notion of race, in general, as well as on the notion of the human race, in particular. Documents on animal races are found under Races”^[7]. Thus, “animal races” and “human race” are explicitly differentiated. Sources that served to establish the subject heading are also presented.

The screenshot of the Rameau notice for *Race* (Figure 1) allows us to understand this knowledge organization system. Authority records are structured according to different zones corresponding to the three characteristics of indexing language: controlled vocabulary (one concept = one descriptor), semantic network (hierarchical and associative relations unite terms), and pre-coordinated language (syntax allows for the construction of subject headings).

The chevrons indicate excluded terms (<) as well as hierarchical (<< or >>) and associative relations (>> <<). Thus, *Race* is used for (<) *Human--Races*, *Human Race*, and *Human Races*. These latter terms were not retained to represent the term *Race* but serve as access points to the information. The double dash -- signifies a subdivision, here between subjects (the second provides a clarification to the first). *Human* refers to 3038 authority records, and *Races* to 99.

The generic term (<<) is *Typology (physical anthropology)*, which means that *Race* depends hierarchically on physical anthropology. The specific terms (>>) are Negro race, Caucasian race, Mongoloid race, which means that these subject headings depend on the term

Race. Ten associated terms (>> <<) refer to related subject headings: *Race consciousness*, *Crime and race*, *Ethnocentrism*, *Eugenics*, *Miscegenation*, *Race (French word)*, *Races (zootechnics)*, *Racism*, *Interethnic relations*, *Sciences and racism*.

Notice RAMEAU

Notice Au format public

Race

Vedette matière nom commun. S'emploie en tête de vedette.

Sous cette vedette, on trouve les documents sur la notion de race, en général, ainsi que sur la notion de race humaine, en particulier. Les documents sur les races animales se trouvent sous Races

<Employé pour :

- Homme -- Races
- Race humaine
- Races humaines

<<Terme(s) générique(s) :

- [Typologie \(anthropologie physique\)](#)

>><<Terme(s) associé(s) :

- [Conscience de race](#)
- [Criminalité et race](#)
- [Ethnocentrisme](#)
- [Eugénisme](#)
- [Métissage](#)
- [Race \(le mot français\)](#)
- [Races \(zootechnie\)](#)
- [Racisme](#)
- [Relations interethniques](#)
- [Sciences et racisme](#)

>>Terme(s) spécifique(s) :

- [Race caucasoïde](#)
- [Race négroïde](#)
- [Race mongoloïde](#)

Source(s) :

Grand Larousse universel . - Encycl. universalis, 1989
 Dict. de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie / P. Bonte, M. Izard, 1991 . - Le dict. des sciences humaines / J.-F. Dortier, 2004 . - L'idée de race dans les sciences humaines et la littérature, XVIIIe-XIXe siècles / S. Moussa, 2003 . - L'humanité au pluriel : la génétique et la question des races / B. Jordan, 2008

Figure 1 - Screenshot of the Rameau notice for the term "Race" (July 2023)

In contrast to Rameau, which indexes the term *Race*, Wikipedia indexes the term *Human race*. *Race* is not a category on Wikipedia but a page; it contains the disclaimer: “This article is about the concept of race in zoology.” it is linked to the categories *Animal race*, *Zoological nomenclature*, and *Taxonomic rank*. However, the last section of the article discusses *Other uses of the term* and mentions the designation of “subgroups of the human species formed by hereditary differences in skin color and morphology^[8]”. There is then an implicit suggestion: the human species would be linked to the animal race by its morphological characteristics.

For Rameau, *Human race* is a term excluded from subject headings and used for *Race*, which only concerns humans. When *Races* is used in the plural, it is a subject heading that refers to the animal branch.

We see here two different ways of distinguishing between the human species and the animal species: one considers the “Human race” as referring to the notion of race, the other directly adopts the notion of the “Human race” and refers “everything else” to zoology.

In the Figure 2, the category *Human race* is attributed to 25 pages and has three subcategories:

- White (human), which has one subcategory and 34 pages.
- Black (human), which has 9 subcategories and 10 pages.
- Racism, which has 25 subcategories and 193 pages.

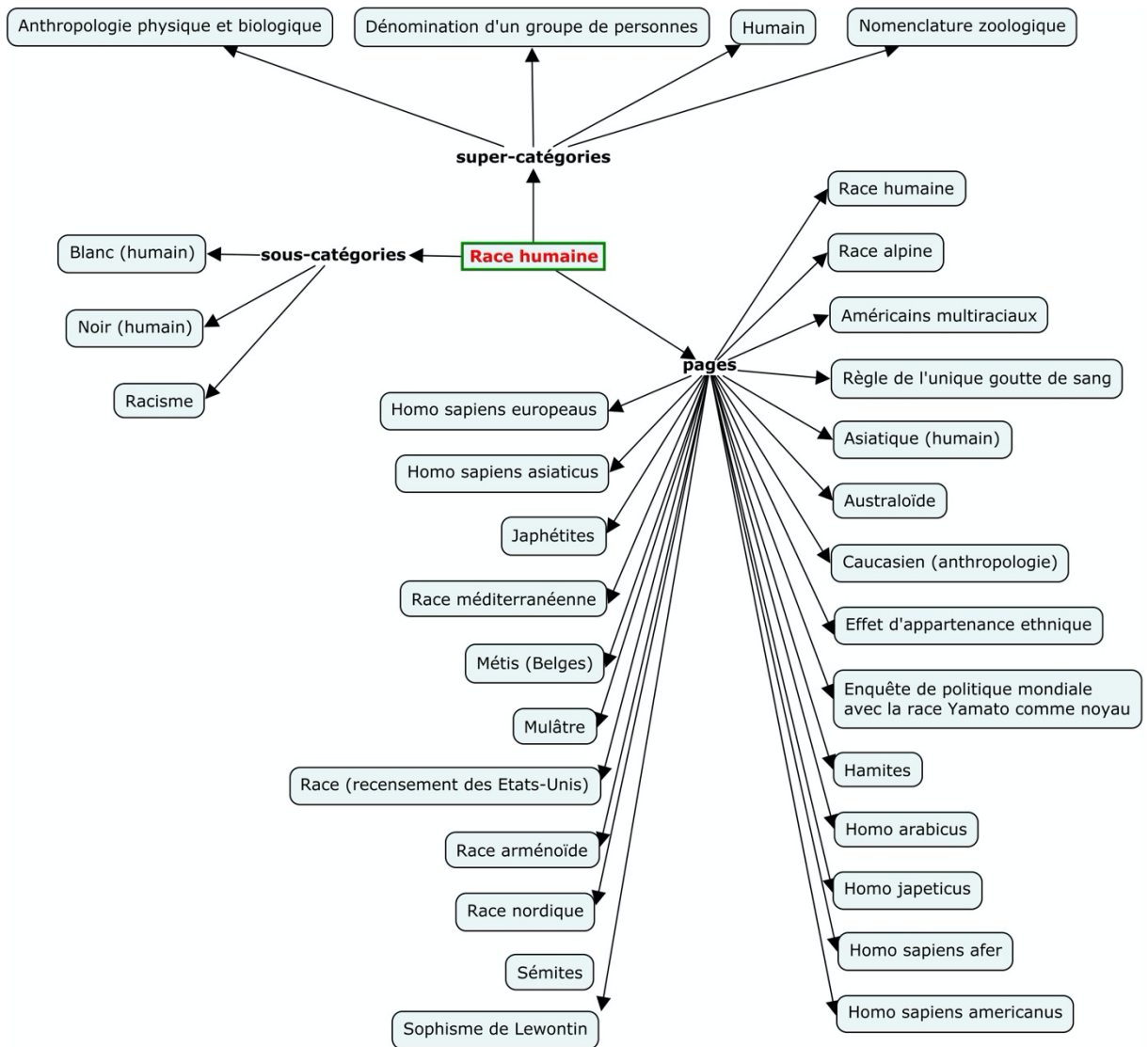


Figure 2 - Graphical representation of the results of the query on the category “Human race” conducted on July 19, 2023. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catégorie:Race_humaine

The PetScan service performs very precise queries and can generate all the pages in a given category or lists of categories, scanning the tree of subcategories to a given depth. Thus, the category “Human race” returns 292 pages at depth 1, 1351 at depth 2, and 4828 at depth 3; the pages are classified by their ID.

Here, we verify that term redirection pages under Wikipedia contribute to knowledge organization. Table 1 highlights the history of the appellations of the “Human race” page, whereas redirection pages to “Race” appear more as frequent “searches” on Wikipedia.

Table 1 - Term redirection pages for Race and Human race under Wikipedia

| Articles | Race | Race humaine |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Redirections | Pure race Sous-race Racial Races Ta race Race animale | Races humaines Histoire du concept de race dans l'espèce humaine Race (anthropologie physique) Race (anthropobiologie) Race latine Race anglo-saxonne |

The terms “racialization” and “racization” will not be found in the BNF authority records, but those of *racialism*, *racism*, *interethnic relations*, and *race consciousness*. However, “racialization” refers to 40 bibliographic records, while “racization” refers to 4 records.

The subject heading *racialism*, defined as a “pseudo-scientific current of thought at the origin of the theory of races in the 19th century”^[9], is an associated term and does not exist in the hierarchy as a generic or specific term. However, it has two bibliographic records in the BNF. On Wikipedia, there is no category for *Racialism*, and the Racialism page refers to the categories *History of science* and *Eugenics*.

Consider the query for the term “racialization” in the Encyclopedia. In May 2023, a redirect page pointed to the article entitled “racization” and contained a section dealing with the political controversies over the use of this term in academic circles. By mid-July, this redirection no longer exists, and the “Racization” page, modified on July 12, 2023, incorporates the term while differentiating between “racialization” and “racization”. This dynamism in the construction of “pages” reveals the evolving knowledge and the instability of knowledge organization that results from it.

We now turn our attention to the connections between Wikipedia and Rameau. The Wikipedia page *White supremacy* refers to the Rameau subject heading *Movements for white*

supremacy, citing Wikipedia in its sources [White supremacy: <https://fr.wikipedia.org> (2018-05-30)]. This link is, therefore, bidirectional. Note that on Wikipedia, *White supremacy* is a subcategory of *White Nationalism*, belonging to the Nationalism portal created in 2022 and still under construction. However, the link from Wikipedia to Rameau regarding *Black Nationalism*, which has its own category and Rameau concept, is unidirectional.

Another example of a unidirectional link from Rameau to Wikipedia is the *Culture of Erasing*, which cites the “Cancel culture” page in its sources [Cancel culture: <https://fr.wikipedia.org> (2022-02-18)]. The precision of the terms excluded from Rameau and the redirected pages of Wikipedia is interesting to note in Table 2.

Table 2 - Culture of erasure and cancel culture

| Rameau Vedettes-matières | Rameau Termes exclus | BNF Notices biblio liées | Wikipédia Catégories | Wikipédia Redirections Articles | Wikipédia Articles |
|--|---|--------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|
| Culture de l'effacement Mention Source Wikipédia : Cancel culture : https://fr.wikipedia.org (2022-02-18) | Call out culture Cancel culture Culture de l'annulation Culture de l'ostracisation Culture de la négation Culture du bannissement Culture du boycottage | 7 | Boycott Culture Internet Société américaine Cyberharcèlement Vengeance | CancelSouthPark (redirection vers la section « Dans la culture populaire ») Culture du « call-out » Culture de la suppression Culture de l'annulation Culture du bannissement Culture de la dénonciation Culture de l'annulation Culture de l'effacement | Cancel culture |

One last term to explore is “Woke” chosen by Wikipedia and “Wokisme” preferred by Rameau. Here, it should be noted that, unlike Rameau, “Woke” is not a category but belongs to multiple categories that have no equivalent in Rameau. The difference here is major in the orientation of the treatment of the “Woke” movement, with a historical context provided by Wikipedia, its role for minorities, its pitfalls with “cancel culture”, and its political oppositions (Table 3). The term “Wokisme” chosen by Rameau reflects more of a critical approach with its detractors and defenders but does not establish connections with the struggles of minorities, which are otherwise well represented in Rameau's concepts.

Table 3 - Wokisme and Woke

| Rameau Vedettes-matières | Rameau Termes exclus | BNF Notices biblio liées | Wikipédia Catégories | Wikipédia Redirections Articles | Wikipédia Articles |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|------------------------------|
| Wokisme | Idées wokistes Idéologie woke Wokeness Wokism | 13 | Mouvement culturel Black Lives Matter Antiracisme Minorité ethnique Lesbiennes, gays, bisexuels et transgenres Culture afro- américaine Culture LGBT Gauche (politique) Intersectionnalité Consommation Société américaine Groupe ou mouvement politique aux États-Unis Expression ou néologisme politique Expression américaine Expression argotique Idéologie Controverse en politique | Wokisme Culture woke Mouvement woke | Woke |

6 Conclusion

While the limited number of terms explored does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions, the observed differences encourage us to continue this study by delving into the controversial themes covered by the SSH and their relationships with categories and Rameau.

The social collective authority of Wikipedia is based on its editors forming an enunciative authority, whereas the collective authority of Rameau remains institutional. It appears that the richness of Wikipedia lies in the diversity of its editors' interests, and standardization of categorization would crush what makes it unique: documentation accessible to all on emerging themes that are not yet classifiable. Articles will always be subject to discussion, which prevents them from falling under the influence of propagation techniques (Boullier 2023) that cascade through society. Here, one may notice the necessary slowness in the controlled evolution of Rameau's language and sometimes its temporal "handicap" compared to Wikipedia's more quickly created categories. However, the proliferation of these categories still needs to be contained to prevent their hierarchy from becoming completely unreadable.

Numerous projects exist between Wikipedia and libraries. Let us note the one from the Milner Library (Willey and Yon 2018), which aims to improve bibliographic records and has relied on a survey using Wikipedia lists and categories to identify the characteristics of authors, using the terminology of the new controlled vocabulary, Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT).

A tool to visualize the differences between Wikipedia categories and Rameau subject headings remains to be invented.

Endnotes

1. Répertoire D'autorité-Matière Encyclopédique Et Alphabétique Unifié (Rameau).
<https://rameau.bnf.fr/>
2. The managers' identities are communicated, as are the contacts by type of question and the representatives of users (libraries).
3. https://rameau.bnf.fr/sites/default/files/2023-03/Page_accueil_FNPR_2023_03_24.pdf
4. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Conventions_sur_les_cat%C3%A9gories
5. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discussion_Wikip%C3%A9dia:Conventions_sur_les_cat%C3%A9gories#Double_cat%C3%A9gorisation_vs_listes
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