

Indexing To My Old Master

Michelle Caples

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

INFOST 511G Organization of Information

Wan-Chen Lee

April 21, 2024

1. Document Analysis Method

I will use Wilson's and part of Langridges' (Joudrey, D. N., Taylor, A. G., & Wisser, K. M., 2018. Chapter 9) method to analyze the document *To My Old Master*. I chose to use this method because Wilson's method is suitable for the purpose of indexing a document for a large database. Based on Wilson's four methods-Purposive, Figure-Ground, Objective Method, and Cohesion Method, Wilson's method is a proficient way to meet the criteria of this assignment. Wilson's approach allows me to gain a better understanding of performing subject analysis, controlled vocabulary, and how this impacts the indexing process. Wilson's approach also seemed straightforward and easier to apply as someone who is a novice to indexing. Wilson's approach provides me with a way to navigate analyzing the material that makes sense to me now. However, for the sake of aboutness, I will defer to Langridge's Approach, and his three questions: What is it? What is it for? and What is it about?

2. Subject Analysis

2.1 *To My Old Master* is a letter written by former slave, Jourdan Anderson, to his former master, Colonel P.H. Anderson in 1865. The letter is a first-person account or narrative of Jourdan Anderson's post-Civil War life experience as a slave in Tennessee and as a free Black man living in the state of Ohio, which was a free state (state that prohibited slavery). Jourdan Anderson is the subject matter based on Wilson's *Purposive Method*. The purpose of the letter is to respond to his former master's request, but also to express his sentiments about life as a slave and as a free man.

2.2 My initial assessment of the document remained the same after re-reading the document. This letter is of historical and cultural significance as it is a first-hand account of the unpaid wages to the benefit of the slave master, physical brutality of slavery, and the ruthlessness of slavery. The letter also recounts the experience of living as a free Black man who can earn a living, support his family, and educate his children while living in the north.

3. Indexing

3.1 Derive Indexing: freedom, free papers, slaves, master, recompense.

I chose the term freedom because this is a concept that is often to describe what slavery prohibited. I chose free papers because that captures the fact Jourdan Anderson had obtained his freedom and could not be summoned back to a plantation. Slaves is a term that describes a former way of life for Jourdan and Mandy Anderson. Master is a term that describes the former relationship between Jourdan Anderson and his former owner, P.H. Anderson. Recompense is a term that describes the wages Jourdan Anderson feels he is owed, but also it is a term that describes the harm of working for free like an animal. The set of terms creates metadata that

references the information in the letter and are common terms associated with slavery.

3.2 Free Indexing Terms- Intelligent, pragmatic, chiding

I chose the term intelligent because the letter recounts the past, present, and future of Jourdan Anderson and his family from his point of view to his former master. Pragmatic because the letter has Mr. Anderson questioning the benefits, if any, of returning to work for his former master. Mr. Anderson recounts horrific events that do not bode well for returning to work for P.H. Anderson. Chiding was a term selected because Mr. Jourdan Anderson is now in the position to chide P.H. Anderson for his attempted murder attempt on his life, his enslavement of his family, and the audacity of P.H. Anderson to request he return to save the farm. I chose this set of terms because it embodies the purposive method of Wilson's approaches.

3.3 Assigned Indexing

Terms: slave, freedom, personal narrative, slave narrative

I chose these two terms slave and freedom because they represent two eras of Jourdan Anderson's life. The two words as a set are important because slavery and freedom are two terms that generate subsets of metadata. I chose personal narrative because the letter is a recount of Jourdan Anderson's years as a slave and a free man. The set of words is the application of Wilson's *Cohesion Method*, where slave, freedom, and personal narrative attest to the unity of the content provided in the letter. Slavery is a historical event in American culture, as was the ending of slavery in American culture. Mr. Anderson's personal narrative about his slavery experience does require the observer of this information to have a cursory knowledge of slavery in America. While using ERIC thesaurus for my terms, the following results came back: the term slave, which resulted in *slavery* as the main entry. The term freedom resulted in four results: *Academic freedom, Freedom of Speech, Intellectual Freedom, and Freedom*. The search term personal narrative in ERIC yielded one result-*Personal Narratives*. I tried slave narrative, but that did not pull up a result on ERIC.

4. Discussion and Analysis

(1) How well each of the three indexing approaches in step 3 express the subject matter you established in step 2?

The three indexing approaches in step three supported the subject matter in step two, because all the terms utilized Wilson's Figure-Ground method, by determining Jourdan Anderson was the central character of the letter. The Figure-Ground also utilizes the subject of Jourdan Anderson to embody the ideas of slave, master, freedom, and personal narrative. Moral knowledge, history, social practice, and Criticism are forms of distinct knowledge Langridge's approach mentions to determine the aboutness of an information resource and they help support context for the thoughts and observations of the subject matter.

(2) Whether the three indexing approaches stress particular parts of the subject matter, and if so, how?

The three indexing approaches stress parts of the subject matter (Jourdan Anderson) by showing that the different concepts are related to each other and the subject matter. Wilson's *Objective Method* is at play in this instance because I understand that concepts like slave and freedom are related to each other in a historical sense. The terms intelligent, pragmatic, chide relate to each other (abstractly), because the letter is an intelligent response to a former master, which is pragmatic in asking for financial and security guarantees. The letter also chides the former master for shooting at him, years of unpaid labor, and the audacity the master has in writing Jourdan Anderson in the first place. Intelligent, pragmatic, and chide are terms that do not appear in the letter, but are background ideas about the subject's real motives for responding to his former slave master. The purpose of the letter in one sense is a response to the slave master's request for his former slave to come home. The document also chides the old master for his murder of a soldier, his attempted murder of his former slave, rape of slave women, and no wages for generations of free labor. The letter also points out how better off Jourdan Anderson is in his new life as free man. The letter can be broken down into "topics" such as slaves, personal narrative, freedom, or history, which is a way to access the article and provide a sense of aboutness that Langridge describes. This is the reason the letter was so widely published during its time and is a historical document today.

(3) Which set of index terms provide the best access to the article? Justify your position.

Slave, freedom, and personal narrative, my assigned indexing terms provides the best access to the article. I feel Langridge's Approach (Joudrey, D. N., Taylor, A. G., & Wisser, K. M., 2018, Chapter 9) about the aboutness of an information resource comes into play here. What is a slave? What was a slave for? What is slave about? The same questions can be applied to the index terms freedom and personal narrative also. Overall, personal narrative may provide the best access to the article, because slave and freedom have so many subsets that do not lead to a letter. The website *To My Old Master* is housed on is a blog, *Letters of Note*, which compiles letters, per the site host, Shaun Usher. There is not a good set of index terms that lead directly to the *Letters of Note* blog site. However, the term slave narrative, in the Bing search engines retrieves [About this Collection | Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938 | Digital Collections | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#) as a search result.

References

Wikipedia contributors. (2024, April 18). Slave narrative. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 03:44, April 22, 2024, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Slave_narrative&oldid=1219532321

Work Projects Administration (WPA). (n.d.-b). *About this collection: born in slavery: Slave narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938: digital collections: library of Congress*. The Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>

Joudrey, D. N., Taylor, A. G., & Wisser, K. M. (2018). *The Organization of Information*. (pp.437-472) Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Usher, S. (2022, January 28). *To my old master*. news.lettersofnote.com. <https://news.lettersofnote.com/p/to-my-old-master>

