Thematic map of interdisciplinary domains based on their terminological representation. The Gender Studies

Abstract: The analysis of the terminological representation of interdisciplinary domains is a method that helps us identify terminological dynamics and the conceptual model to organize these spaces. This study applies this approach to Gender Studies, to arrive at the behaviour and the problems posed by the domain, and a possible model for its organization.

1. Objectives

There are different kinds of interdisciplinarity to be identified by their modes of construction and the inherent structure shown by each interdiscipline (Caidi, 2002). The terminological representation of the domain plays a very important role in this process.

The present contribution aims to describe the terminological behaviour of Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary domain. The study is based on the terminology retrieved from specialized documents which will complement previous research based on Internet search engine structures, as shown in their directories (López-Huertas & Barité, 2002; Marcella, 2002), and on structures found in thesauri (López-Huertas, Torres & Barité, 2004).

The documents published on any discipline or specialized field reflect the state of knowledge of that discipline (Hjorland, 2002), as well as shedding light on its epistemology, especially when a complete or substantial body of documents is considered, instead of a sample used to represent the domain. This study considers the total amount of publications on Gender Studies published in Uruguay. An analysis of the terminology extracted from the indexed documents may afford a perspective of terminological dynamics at the domain level. Accordingly, it will express how the different discourses taken into consideration in the studied interdiscipline are represented, it will help in studying the possible problems caused by terminological drifting, and it will discover the capacity of the interdisciplinary domain Gender Studies in generating—or not—a univocal and exclusive language of its own. All in all, terminology is key in approaching the thematic map of a interdisciplinary domain, in this case Gender Studies.

2. Materials and Methods

Six hundred primary documents specialized in Gender Studies in the Spanish language, printed in Uruguay from 1990 to 2005, were indexed. The identification of the documents was done through the following sources: 1) Internet searches (Google) using the words feminism, women, woman, Gender and Uruguay. This search took us to web pages for Women’s ONGs or Women Associations that have a library and reference section holding monographs, articles, etc., and an electronic journal proving very helpful for obtaining terminology. 2) The catalogue of the National Library of Uruguay at Montevideo, which is the repository of the Legal Deposit. 3) Online catalogues of the Universidad de la República libraries: a subject search was conducted using the words feminism, women, woman, Gender.

The indexed documents were of the following typology: monographs, periodical publications, conference proceedings and research and socio-political reports. This variety has the advantage of including different discourses which will enrich the final vocabulary.
Abundant grey literature was produced in the Gender domain; reports of different natures and content made up a considerable part of the total documents.

Free key words were assigned after analyzing the content of the documents. Terms were selected from titles, abstracts and main headings in monographs, articles and reports. In the case of specialized divulgation journals, permanent sections or columns and headings were taken into account to extract terminology.

The obtained terminology was located in a relational data base on the Access platform that was designed for the occasion. It has seven fields: name of term, identification number, source of term provenance, source code, onomasiological variants, semasiological variants and context. This data base can give results on request that are very helpful for this type of study, such as lists of terms in excel, frequencies of terms, sources of the terms, etc.

Terminology in the data base was later examined according to a quantitative methodology based on the frequency of the terms’ appearance in the documents. The assessment of this indicator was important because the interdisciplinary in question is in the process of consolidation, meaning that its terminology is unstable to a considerable degree. The higher or lower impact of the selected terms within the domain will provide important information. A qualitative analysis would be an interesting procedure to be followed in order to complete the information that the quantitative method yielded. Nevertheless, it has not be considered in this study.

This procedure helped in the identification of different kinds of terms, many of them closely related to their original disciplinary provenance, and which showed how these “outsider” terms were incorporated into the interdisciplinary domain, according to the Gender epistemology.

3. Results

After studying the terminology, the following results were observed.

1. The terminology pulled from the Uruguayan documents analyzed summed up 537 terms: 460 were descriptors, 48 identifiers and 29 no-descriptors. The vocabulary showed similar dynamics to those taken from Spanish documents. A small proportion of it is well represented in documents, but most of the terms are not well represented in documents, considering that the frequency is 1.

Figure 1 shows the inverse relation between the number of descriptors and the frequency of appearance in documents. We see that 378 terms out of 489 have only 1 citation. This fact also evidences a terminological dispersion —and therefore a thematic dispersion— confirming the results of similar studies of gender terminology with other terminological resources, such as Internet and thesauri (López-Huertas & Barité, 2002; López-Huertas, Torres & Barité, 2004).

![Figure 1. Descriptor citation frequency.](image-url)
2. A small proportion of the terminology is found to be generated from the interdisciplinary activity itself. That is, it does not originate from any of the origin disciplines that interact within the domain. This terminology, rather, merges to denominate objects and phenomena created by the interdisciplinary domain (feminisms, gender, etc.). Such terms represent 32% of the total 460 descriptors. The terms belonging to this group can be considered nuclear ones, having a quite univocal behaviour; their pertinence to the interdisciplinary domain is beyond question. Nevertheless, they also participate in other general terminological dynamics found in the domain, and can show unstable behaviour in that many terms are in the process of being consolidated, or terminological drift may occur in the case that the terms were originally generated originally in other disciplines. (López-Huertas, M., Barité, M. & Torres, I., 2003). Figure 2 shows the percentage of terms coming from the interdiscipline itself and terms that belonged to other fields.

![Figure 2. Terms in Gender Studies and terms in outside fields](image)

3. Many of the selected terms are originally generated in or belong to other disciplines (other than Gender Studies). This group is formed by terminology which is a result of the aforementioned interaction among disciplines and specialties with the Gender perspective, and it represents 68% of the total descriptors. Terms in this set show a twofold behaviour:

A) Terms that are adopted by the interdiscipline from other fields interacting with the Gender domain, with the same form and apparently the same sense as they have in their original realm. They are incorporated into the domain as a consequence of the interaction of disciplines that has taken place within the domain itself. Documents dealing with any of the interacted disciplines in Gender Studies —labour, health, education, politics, economy, etc., analyzed from the gender perspective— show a lack of terms of their own to name the subjects to be incorporated in the interdisciplinary domain. These dynamics cause a problematic phenomenon that may be referred to as terminological duplicity. The ambiguity resulting from such duplicity has negative effects for the information systems. Specialists approach this problem at the scientific communication level, adding to the titles of documents words such as *women, Gender* or an unambiguous expression together with words taken from the outsider discipline (*Women and Health, women salaries, women in politics*, etc.). In this way, the authors inform that the contents are Gender oriented.

This fact is noticeable in the titles, where phrases such as “women labour market”, “women and politics”, “women and social security”, etc., are common. Authors use such expressions to mark the limits of gender discourse; and while it might be effective at this level, the words they use to mark the gender domain cannot be used to index a document
because gender or women have no meaning when isolated from the topics politics, economy, etc. in this context. The result is that the indexing expressions do not establish any gender distinction, and apparently they maintain the form and meaning they had in the disciplines of origin. This complicates the indexing process for those documents: the gender marks should be rescued in order to use them later in indexing systems. The problem is accentuated when we consider that these systems are moreover expected also to work without reference to the gender perspective, as would be the case of laws or norms that are needed for these systems. This terminological group, while not belonging to the domain itself, has a significant presence in the interdisciplinary domain. They generate terminology that will pose ambiguity problems for the rest of the vocabulary.

Terms in this group represent 74% of the disciplines other than Gender (See Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Terminological behaviour in group B).](image)

B) A group of terms created by the interaction of the Gender perspective with outsider disciplines that represent either new concepts (wage-earning job, under-representation in politics, vertical discrimination, glass ceiling, housewife salary, etc.) or terms representing concepts that already exist yet that gain importance because of the Gender perspective impact (domestic violence, sexual harassment, violence against women, etc.). This set represents the 26% of the total of terms in the outside disciplines. Graph 3 illustrates this relation.

4. The subject composition of the terms in outsider disciplines is reflected in Figure 4. Disciplines such as Rights/Law, Labour, Politics, Customs, Family/Society and Health. Economy and Sexuality are clearly significant in forming the Interdiscipline. Other subjects—Psychology, Culture, Administration, Body/Image, and Others (Demography, Religion and Groups)—are of little importance to the Gender field in the sample.
If we group the subject areas under more general categories, it is easier to see how the Gender perspective interacts with other subject areas. Figure 5 shows this organization.

The thematic composition of the Gender Studies for the sample taken in this research is reflected by Figure 5. The main areas of interaction of the Gender Studies are obviously those dealing with the Social Sciences, Health/Hygiene, and Economy/Business. The internal composition of each main area interacting with Gender Studies can be seen in Figure 6.
5. The vocabulary created by the Interdiscipline will be that coming from group number 2 (gender terms) plus that coming from the creation of new terms and concepts in outside disciplines, as explained in 3 B). Altogether, they sum up 258 terms out of 468 descriptors, representing 55.1% of the total.

4. Conclusions
The results obtained in this research lead us to the following conclusions:

1. There is a need for further research on the dynamics of the interdisciplinary domains from the Information Science perspective.
2. It is important to identify and analyse the terminological representation of interdisciplinary domains, because they have very different dynamics as compared with those of the disciplines per se. This fact has an important effect on the design and construction of indexing systems.
3. The terminology processed in the way described here focuses on the thematic constitution and interaction in interdisciplinary domains. This knowledge is interesting and necessary because it is a key issue in the representation and organization of interdisciplinary domains.
4. Terminological dynamics shed some light on the epistemological situation of the domain, revealing weaknesses and strengths it may have.
5. The study of terminological behaviour can tell us whether indeed we are talking about inter- or transdisciplinarity. It might be said that Gender Studies show transdisciplinary behaviour, although at present the bulk of knowledge is not yet involved. Nevertheless, the Gender perspective has penetrated many disciplines, altering their knowledge structures by creating new concepts and terms, modifying the
traditional scientific structure. This modification, plus the creation of a new language to describe reality, are likewise transdisciplinary characteristics.

6. It is very enlightening to identify the impact of Gender Studies on discourse, especially for resolving the problem of duplicity, as a complement to the terminological methodology followed in this research. Discourse analysis can prove very helpful in delimiting this interdisciplinary domain, once any unclear terminological and conceptual behaviour has been detected.

Notes
1. We were interested in the identification of secondary sources as well, such as specialized dictionaries, vocabularies, etc.; but since we were looking for the production of knowledge in Gender Studies in Uruguay, these publications could not be used because they were not printed in Uruguay.
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References


