



UNIVERSITY OF OSLO
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

The Co-reference Working Group

Øyvind Eide



The problem

- “The sword was collected by Dr. Diggey during his second expedition.” (from a museum catalogue)
- “The doctor arrived in Flattown at noon and had the luck of obtaining a beautiful sword the same afternoon.” (from an expedition report)

How do we know if the persons mentioned in the two examples are the same?

If they are the same, they are said to co-refer.

The same goes for the objects: Do they co-refer?



Two solutions

A curator finds out if there is a co-reference using various sources combined with his knowledge and sometimes instincts. She concludes that “Dr. Diggey” and “the doctor” co-refer.

Traditionally, this is stored as a note, e.g. on the catalogue card, as a footnote in a publications, or in the curator’s personal notebook.

In the future, such information should be stored in a formal digital format so that it can be re-used with the assistance of computers.

Information from many different institutions may then be integrated to create networks of identity.



Examples of use

Internally in the institution: The persons being mentioned in the various sources are identified and co-referenced. Further, they are connected to the events, e.g. expeditions. Then it is easier for future curators to identify where and when items were found or bought.

Externally: The networks of identity can be used to identify whether two different scholars visited the same place during their travels. It may also turn out that they did so at the same time, in which case they may have met.

If they have been identified at the same picture, we can know for sure that they met.



Have we solved all the problems yet?

The Co-reference Working Group was established last year, so yesterday and today are the first meetings where we have time to discuss the problems.

How the group will work is being decided now.

Please take part!