

Discussion

- We draw a distinction between three terms used to name collections of concepts: vocabulary, terminology and ontology.
 - A vocabulary is a collection of terms, without any implied relationship between them. For example, a list of drugs on US market is a vocabulary of drugs.
 - A terminology begins with a vocabulary and adds child-parent (“is-a”) relationships. For example, you introduce the notion of Antibiotics and group certain drugs under that. And beta-blockers. And so on.
 - An ontology goes one step further and introduces relationships other than is-a. For example, we can say that Acetaminophen “treats” headache. Here, “treats” is a relationship between the drug and a condition, and this relationship is not child-parent. That is what makes it an ontology.
- So technically, an i2b2 ontology is a terminology. However, the term “i2b2 ontology” is an enduring convention which we will continue to agree to use.