# A Rejoinder to Beghtol (2004)

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In our comment (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2004) to Beghtol (2003) we were reacting to the fact that Beghtol describes the classifications developed by scholars as "naïve" while she describes the classifications developed by librarians and information scientists as "professional". We explained that we feared this unfortunate terminology is rooted in misjudgments about the relationships between scientific and scholarly classification on the one hand and LIS classifications on the other. We stated that only a correction of this misjudgment might give us in the field of KO a chance to do a job that is not totally disrespected and disregarded by the rest of the intellectual world.

Beghtol (2004), in her reply to us, claims that the term "naïve" as she defines it, is not a pejorative term. But she fails to explain why. If one is a bit puzzled by her "argument" (as we were) one needs only consult Beghtol's PowerPoint presentation from the ISKO (2004) conference[1]. Here one is informed that Beghtol uses the term "naïve" in its original Latin meaning: "nativus", which simply means "native". We naturally assumed that Beghtol used the term in its usual, modern meaning, i.e. "showing a lack of experience, judgment, or wisdom"[2] (Oxford English Dictionary Online[3]). For that we apologize. However, we would like to suggest that Beghtol and others who wish to use the original Latin meaning of everyday words henceforward inform their readers about their intentions.

Beghtol failed to inform her readers about the "true" meaning of "naïve classification" in both her article and reply. In her reply she claims that:

> The term "naïve classification" is directly analogous to the widely-understood and widely-accepted term "naïve indexing". It is not analogous to the terms to which Hjørland and Nicolaisen compare it (i.e., "naïve physics", "naïve biology" (Beghtol, 2004, p. 55).

There are at least two things wrong with this claim. First, Beghtol presents the case as if we interpret her use of "naïve classification" to be analogous to naïve physics and naïve biology. However, that is not the case. We clearly stated that naïve physics and naïve biology is only mentioned to illustrate what we called "a rather different conception of naïve classification compared to the way Beghtol uses that word" (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2004, p. 58). Second, her claim about naïve indexing being a widely-understood and widely-accepted term fits rather poorly with the fact that searches in both LISA and Social Science Citation Index retrieves zero hits when searched for "naïve indexing". Beghtol do not follow the normal academic practice of referring to the literature on which she bases her argumentation. We have only been able to find two LIS documents that mention the concept. One is Beghtol's own PowerPoint presentation from ISKO (2004). The other is an old Marcia Bates draft located in Google's cache[4]. Bates mentions in her draft a model she terms the "naïve indexing model". Bates explains that "by this is meant the cluster of largely unexamined assumptions that lie behind the more common approaches to the development of indexing and access systems, automated or otherwise". Evidently something quite different than Beghtol has in mind. Bates' draft was later published in revised form in JASIS (Bates, 1998). Interestingly, the revised article does not mention the "naïve indexing model". We consequently disbelieve Beghtol's claim about naïve indexing being a widely-understood and widely-accepted term.

Further Beghtol (2004, p. 62) claims:

> I have nowhere suggested or implied that the broad disciplinary classifications mentioned by Hjørland and Nicolaisen are appropriately categorized as "naïve classifications." For example, I have not associated the Periodic System of the Elements with naïve classifications, as Hjørland and Nicolaisen state that I have done. Indeed,

https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2004-3-199 - am 13.01.2026, 10:33:37. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

> broad classifications of this type fall well outside the definition of naïve classifications set out in my paper.

Again, there are at least two things wrong with this claim. First, in our comment to Beghtol (2003) we did NOT state that she had associated the Periodic System of the Elements with naïve classifications. We actually wrote: "it should be said, however, that Beghtol does not consider the Periodic System or any other scientific systems for that matter" (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2004, p. 55). Second, Beghtol's article (2003) DOES imply that the broad disciplinary classifications mentioned by us (e.g., the Periodic System of the Elements) are appropriately categorized as "naïve classifications". Although her article lacks a clear-cut definition of the concept of "naïve classifications", it contains a few hints to what the term covers:

> "The general purpose of these naïve classification systems is to help advance disciplinary knowledge in some way" (Beghtol, 2003, p. 65).

> "In contrast to information retrieval classification systems that support an environment in which searchers look for recorded knowledge, naïve knowledge discovery classifications support a scholarly environment in which new questions are expected to be asked of primary research materials. These classifications *lay the groundwork for new theory and point to new areas of study*" (Beghtol, 2003, p. 65; emphasis added to indicate that Beghtol cites Altman (1967, p. 64) for this).

The Periodic System of the Elements fits these descriptions perfectly. The predictive value of the periodic law has helped the advancement of scientific knowledge enormously, and it is a well-known fact that it has laid the groundwork for much new theory, and that it has pointed to many new areas of study. See, for instance, the following fragment from the article on the periodic law from Encyclopedia Britannica Online[5]:

> "The great value of the periodic law was made evident by Mendeleyev's success in 1871 in finding that the properties of 17 elements could be correlated with those of other elements by moving the 17 to new positions from those indicated by their atomic weights. This change indicated that there were small errors in the previously accepted atomic weights of several of the elements and large errors for several others, for which wrong multiples of the combining weights had been used as atomic weights (the combining weight being that weight of an element that combines with a given weight of a standard). Mendeleyev was also able to predict the existence, and many of the properties, of the then undiscovered elements eka-boron, eka-aluminum, and eka-silicon, now identified with the elements scandium, gallium, and germanium, respectively. Similarly, after the discovery of helium and argon, the periodic law permitted the prediction of the existence of neon, krypton, xenon, and radon. Moreover, Bohr pointed out that the missing element 72 would be expected, from its position in the periodic system, to be similar to zirconium in its properties rather than to the rare earths; this observation led G. de Hevesy and D. Coster in 1922 to examine zirconium ores and to discover the unknown element, which they named hafnium".

So, as just documented, broad classifications like e.g., the Periodic System of the Elements do NOT fall outside the descriptions of naïve classifications provided by Beghtol (2003).

A final point: Beghtol (2003; 2004) wish to distinguish between classifications for new knowledge ("naïve classifications") and classifications for previously existing knowledge ("professional classifications"). This strikes us as an odd classification. Classifications are designed for serving human purposes. The classification of diseases by cause, for example, serves the purpose of preventing and curing diseases (e.g. by vaccine). The classifications provided by LIS is assumed to support the same goals, why medical documents are normally classified using the same criteria as medical science uses to classify diseases. In this way LIS-classifications are very dependent on the conceptualizations and classifications made outside LIS. Our professionalism must relate to this fact. When doctors classify diseases (Beghtol: "naïve classification") new knowledge may be produced and existing knowledge be retrieved by that classification. Also: When information scientists classify documents about diseases ("professional classification") existing knowledge may be retrieved and new knowledge discovered (cf. Swanson, 1986[6]).

https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2004-3-199 - am 13.01.2026, 10:33:37. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

## Notes

1 http://www.ucl.ac.uk/isko2004/sysweb/1aBeghtol.ppt. Beghtol received our comment on her article May 8, 2004. Her presentation at ISKO (2004) took place July 14th 2004.

2 One might say, that her arguments for choosing the terms "naive" and "professional" are more related to the usual, modern meaning. Beghtol (2003, p. 64) writes: "classifications for information retrieval are called "professional" classifications because they are devised be people who have a professional interest in classification, and classification for knowledge discovery are called "naive" classifications because they are devised by people who have no particular interest in studying classification as an end in itself". In this way her arguments imply that LIS classifications are more "professional" and by implication that scholarly classifications are less professional. This may be seen as a kind of disciplinary imperialism. If one considers the literature about classification as we did in Hjørland & Nicolaisen (2004) the high standard of much literature about scholarly classification makes this claim extremely thin.

3 http://www.oed.com/

4 http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:svdvSQqgCJkJ:www.isrl.uiuc.edu/~ddubin/allerton/96/s1/bates.html

5 http://search.eb.com/

6 Swanson discovered that two bodies of literature – one on the circulatory effects of dietary fish oil and the other on the circulatory disorder Raynaud's disease – had no direct connection (i.e., no researcher had yet used fish oil to treat Raynaud's disease), but did suggest a connection worth exploring through his unique bibliographic analysis. Swanson suggests that there are many other disconnected fragments of knowledge in the literature to which his analysis would be able to make connections.

## References

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"Dr. Beghtol declines to comment further, but she invites KO readers to write to the Editor to express their own views about the issues raised."

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