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Library-Bibliographical Classification: On the Path of Renovation

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The perspectives of reorganization of the Library-Bibliographical Classification (LBC) are described. The possibilities of a transformation of this classification system into a scientifically based "knowledge base" for traditional and electronic catalogues are shown. Difficulties and obstacles in pursuing the completion of LBC reconstruction are expounded. (Authors)

1. Introduction

The Library-Bibliographical Classification (LBC) was developed over 30 years ago in a socialist state, mainly for the needs of Soviet libraries. It was based on an ideology that dominated society at that time and reflected the level of development of scientific knowledge in the 60s of the 20th century.

The radical changes of recent years which took place in political, ideological and socio-economic life in Russia, called for a critical revision of the LBC. We want to acquaint specialists with the programme of renovation of the LBC, which will not only make it possible to retain the significance of this classification system, but put it among the most perfect contemporary world classification systems.

2. Some Results of the Development of the LBC as a System

More or less detailed descriptions of the LBC were printed in different publications (1, 2). The LBC belongs to the class of combinative (or semi-faceted) hierarchical classification systems. For example, the UDC and the DDC (the latter only since the time the independent tables of subdivisions appeared) also pertain to systems of this type. However, the LBC has a number of characteristic features which make it different from systems with a similar structure. The LBC tables are presented in numerous interconnected versions which differ in the volume of information (full, medium and abridged) and in their purpose, which takes into account the peculiarities of book stocks and the needs of patrons of a certain type of libraries (academic, public, regional, children's and school libraries).

Another peculiar feature of the LBC is the presence within its framework of uniform tables of special parts intended for the classifying of printed music and sound

recordings, graphic materials and cartographic productions. A special version of the LBC has been developed for local-lore catalogues of libraries. At present, work on the creation of the knowledge base - a machine-readable variant of the LBC tables - is being completed.

Since 1977 the LBC is furnished with an alternative system to the notation of letter divisions of the main array. The parallel array of numerical symbols makes it easier to use in cases when the use of letters of the Russian alphabet presents certain difficulties.

The LBC tables have been translated into many languages: Armenian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, German, Mongolian, Slovak, Spanish Turkmen, Uzbek, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, and Czech.

The LBC is a very flexible system and is being incessantly improved. Over 140 separate issues of extensions and corrections have been put out. As recently as in the 80s, tables of common subdivisions (1983), territorial subdivisions (1985), ethnic subdivisions (1987) and tables based on the language characteristic (1988) were developed and published. New principles were laid down in the reissued division of the LBC for biology (1988), sociology (1989) and philological sciences (1990). Substantial changes have been introduced into the structure and content of the divisions for mechanics, theoretical physics, solid-state physics, nuclear physics, optics, probability theory, mathematical statistics, pedagogics, library science, bibliography, information sciences, printing, museology, music, and many other disciplines.

The LBC has become the main classification system for the majority of libraries of Russia and the neighbouring countries. It has been accepted in universal scientific libraries, the entire network of public libraries, and special libraries in the field of the humanities. The UDC is used only in technical, medical, and agricultural libraries. Possibilities of application of the LBC not only for systematic catalogues and files and the arrangement of book stocks, but also for bibliographical aids and indexes for material grouping, control and statistics, have been examined. The LBC classification numbers are presented in books and on printed catalogue cards.

Experience has shown that the LBC realizes its potential possibilities much more effectively in conditions of automation. The element-by-element method of information search, developed in our library, yields good results and

makes the OPAC a convenient tool for readers and bibliographies.

This is the conclusion we have reached. From the standpoint of its structural, grammatical and technical possibilities, already today the LBC ranks on a par with contemporary systems, which ensure effective manual and machine search of information. Nevertheless, it is more difficult to present such a concise assessment of its content. Of course, all classification systems lose their actuality with the passing of time, since it is impossible to stop the development of science and social practice. However, it sometimes happens that by reason of outward factors, say radical changes in ideology and socio-economic life, a classification becomes obsolete in a matter of moments, so to say, and calls for thorough revision. That is what happens in the given case.

Nonetheless, the LBC possesses a mechanism which makes it possible to ensure up-to-date control of everything that is new and constantly changing in the life of society, in the development of science and practice. These phenomena can be reflected in the LBC without any radical breaking-up of its structure. That is why we speak here of the renovation of the LBC, first of all of its content. This renovation does not effect the principles of its structure, logic and grammar.

3. Science, Society, and Classification Practice

Trends of development of science, and different changes in the social sphere of life of society find reflection in documents, in books and, first of all in articles. They are available for the compilers of classification systems and can be subjected to classification analysis. But does this mean that librarians and information workers should apply themselves to the structuring of problems of science or social practice? It is generally known that developers of classification tables, as a rule, lean on the opinion of scientists, experts in this or that branch of science. They can, of course suggest some solutions of different classification problems or alternative variants, but this method should not be considered to be a primary one.

The classification of documents is a secondary outcome. It rests on the classification structures of pure science, and it cannot and should not be a substitute for them. First of all scientists should conduct an analysis of these or those tendencies of concepts, phenomena, new results, etc., and formulate them. If possible, all these questions should be discussed among them and a general standpoint should be reached. Only after that should compilers of classification systems make use of these data. However, this does not always happen.

One cannot possibly overlook the radical changes in ideology and economic policy that are being wrought in our country. Nevertheless, scientists have not as yet put into order the new concepts and trends of development of life of society. It is said that a certain period of time must elapse before this will become a reality. In the meantime this period will continue to be a critical one for classifica-

tion tables and systematic catalogues. Readers, as a rule, live with present-day problems, and the language of the tables and the structure of the catalogue naturally seems very archaic to them.

We are contemporaries of the crisis of many theoretical theses and hypotheses in the field of cosmology, physics, and biology. We all see that today the problem of Man, the realization of his place in the Universe, the exposure of the dependence between the physical and physic nature of Man comes into the foreground. Yet the fact that we are aware of the situation does not make the classification tables appear in the new structures. We are told that time is needed for these tendencies to find realization in complex scientific theory.

Many people assess the aforementioned phenomena more calmly, proceeding from the essentially correct concept that classification practice always was and always will be of a pragmatic, applied nature. Nonetheless, the LBC was created from the very beginning as a scientific system. Hundreds of scientists of the Academy of Sciences, dozens of institutions of higher learning and scientific establishments, which represented both pure and applied sciences, participated in the development of the system. Logicality of the classification structure represents a significant condition of effectiveness of information retrieval. Logicality and the scientific approach are closely interconnected, and that is why the compilers of the LBC aimed to lean on stable scientific views, fixed in documents, and hardly ever permitted themselves to artificially "attach" additional themes. That is why the desire to maintain the scientific level of the LBC, even in this period of radical changes, is a natural one.

4. Programme of Development: The General Conception and Concrete Solutions

First of all the national and class-dogmatic approach to the solution of political, ideological, and economic problems must be overcome. Today the LBC tables are being freed from the pressure of the so-called "party-principles" and from the aspiration to juxtapose, divide and confront the different social systems with one another. As opposed to many other classification systems, many expansive classification divisions frequently containing a critical evaluation of this social phenomenon are now being accepted.

The divisions of philosophical sciences are being thoroughly revised. Here the unjustified contraposing of "Marxist-Leninist" philosophy against all other philosophical doctrines is being removed, and new classification characteristics, which are traditional for world philosophical science, are being accepted as a matter of principle. At the same time, the tables for the history of philosophy, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, social philosophy, etc., are being reviewed.

In our society the attitude toward religion has radically changed. The division for religion has now attained new content, enriched by contemporary ideas. This division

will be broadened, ordered and freed of all confessional preferences, ideological, and other dogmas. The place of atheism, its structure and content, are being reconsidered accordingly.

The division by social systems ("socialist countries", "developing countries", "capitalist countries"), which lay at the basis of many divisions for social sciences, is being eliminated. History, politics, state and law, economy and sociology can now push subject divisions into the foreground.

Economic sciences: It is here that the most important structural and substantial changes have been introduced. Hitherto all political economy was examined in our country from two angles: "political economy of socialism" and "political economy of capitalism". Today changes are being wrought not only in theoretical divisions, but also in divisions for concrete (special) branches of economy.

The structure and content of the divisions for history is being revised in the light of the new approach to the periodization of world history and in keeping with the changes wrought on the political map of the world.

At the same time, the tables for the divisions of natural and applied sciences, which retain their stability to a greater degree, are likewise being edited. Here new combinative variants are introduced, and divisions reflecting contemporary problems are appearing.

In a few years the LBC will develop into a scientific system which will be more stable as regards possible changes in political life. Library specialists in different countries of the world will be faced with new difficulties: the "characteristic features" of which they spoke when describing the LBC, and which actually made the LBC different from nearly all other classification systems, will disappear. Now more attention will have to be given to the structural and functional possibilities of the LBC, its grammar and its principles of classifying and search, both manual and automated.

5. New Content in a New Form

The revised tables of the LBC are immediately recorded on machine-readable data media. The advantages of this form of classification tables are obvious: All extensions and corrections can now be immediately inserted into the text of the tables. Their issue in the conventional book format (with the appropriate notational variants) can now be realized automatically according to a special programme. We intend to charge the machine with a number of labor-consuming operations such as the furnishing of access to the tables in accordance with a concrete thematic (subject) request, the formation of abridged and specialized variants, the translation from the LBC into the UDC and vice versa. The latter task can be realized even on the notational level.

We presume that with the help of the subject entry in a natural language the work with the LBC tables' knowledge base an electronic catalogue can be accomplished autonomously from remote terminals (possibly even from

those that are located outside our country).

In order to successfully realize and complete the intended arrangements certain conditions are necessary. Today we do not have the needed support from scientists, since a substantial part of them are "in motion" (some old traditional faculties have been reformed while new scientific collectives and research institutes are appearing in the country).

Yet another condition for the successful implementation of our programme is the long awaited reconstruction of the Russian State Library, for it is only in that case that the OPAC of the Library will begin to function in full measure. However, at present our country is facing difficult economic conditions and is unable to allot the necessary means for such reconstruction. Maybe this circumstance explains in some measure why today we pay far more attention to theoretical studies than to mastering the OPAC, in which the search potentials of the LBC will be actually realized. However, we hope and believe that the LBC will turn out to be an information retrieval language of a great automated system, which will unite into one dozens of large libraries in Russia, and in the future practically the entire library network of the country.

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