EDITORIAL

What is Classification?

First of all a wholehearted thank-you to all who have responded so favorably from all over the world to the "launching" of INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION No. 1!

At a recent meeting in Atlanta someone said that the history of classification could be traced back to the beginning of mankind, since man classifies whenever he makes a statement applicable to more than one subject. Conceded. But making statements involves language. Hence the interdependence of language and classification.

How, then, could 'classification' be defined? One could say: "classification is the method of establishing and relating classes"; one could also say, it "is the product evolving out of using this method", that is, the established classification system. Others would perhaps say, it "is the process of relating classes to objects of reality or to themes of books or other documents"; others might say, "it is the product resulting from this latter process", that is, the complete notation, e. g. for the contents of a specific book. Finally, there will probably be people who say: "classification is a field of knowledge because there are people active in this field, papers and books on the subject are being produced and a certain terminology has been developed; there are classification societies, there are teachers and students of classification" ...

We shall not try to provide an answer to these somewhat rhetorical questions. In addition, however, we might point out that recently a different approach was used by the members of the Special Interest Group on Classification Research (SIG/CR) of the American Society for Information Science (ASIS) in an attempt to provide a definition of classification: Just as some people define physics as "what physicists do", SIG/CR asked its members about their activities. The answer: little classification research was being done, instead application of classification systems and thesauri, actual classing and indexing was their main activity. Should the name of the SIG thus be changed?

What does the literature say? In the first issue of this journal we started the section called "Classification Literature" with form divisions and we are continuing to do so in this issue also. The references to current literature *on* classification topics will be taken up in the forthcoming one. An outline of the subject categories of this listing may, however, be found in this issue (see p. 109). With this outline and the literature which follows we may perhaps gain a rough impression of what the field of classification appears to be about, the field which we want to explore. Everybody is invited to comment on this outline, to point out deficiencies, to suggest better headings, etc.

The divisions have not been made up deductively, although it may appear so from what follows. They "evolved" from a card file of some thousand references covering the last few years, and their sequence follows a general pattern applicable in a number of fields. For, in any field there are theoretical investigations and relations, of a general character (group 1); in most fields there is a basic object, the morphology and construction of which may be studied (group 2), and in any field there are also methodologies and processes which sometimes even characterize a field of activity (e. g. classification) (see group 3). Such processes are often applied for different purposes; descriptions of applications will then be given in group 8. Most fields also have some special phenomena which may become an object of study. In this outline there are three of them: universal classification systems (group 4), special object classification systems (group 5) and special subject classification systems (group 6). In group 7 we treat subdivisions of the relationship 'classification and language', that is, not language per se, but as applied to problems of classification. Language, with its ability to define concepts and concept combinations, is indeed very basic to classification, it involves many more aspects than any of the relationships mentioned in group 1, thus warranting such a special grouping. But group 7 had to precede the one for the application activities (group 8), since language questions have to be resolved – so to speak – 'before' classing and indexing methods can be applied to special materials. – Then, and only after application of the knowledge of this field in a number of ways and degrees, we get to the more or less professional, social and economic questions in group 9 which was termed 'classification milieu' similar to a group term found in *Computing Reviews*.

So much as to the given outline. As to the 'programme' of this issue: we deliberately selected contributions which emphasize the significance of language and especially terminology for classification. The very timely establishment of Infoterm in Vienna and the new activities of ISO/TC 37 yielded such contributions, see the ones from *H. Felber*, the secretary of both of these institutions, but see also *R. Kocourek's* book review of "The Road to Infoterm" by *E. Wüster*. Also, linguists point to new ideas in the construction of thesauri and dictionaries for multiple purposes (see the article by *J. Petöfi* and the notes about his and *G. Wahrig's* new research projects). Further contributions from linguistics may be gained from *R. Kuhlen's* excellent book review of "Linguistics and Information Science" by *K. Sparck Jones* and *M. Kay*. On the other hand, we searched for treatises warning against an overemphasis on language in relation to classification, and we therefore included the statements on "Language Problems" by *H. Kaiser* posed already some years ago in one of the UNISIST Working Groups but never published, and also R. Fugmann's experienced-based and profound distinctions presented in his significant article on "The Glamour and the Misery of the Thesaurus Approach".

The contents of a journal should never look like a handbook; therefore the topics presented here are not meant to conclude but rather to open the discussion. Thus, let's open it!

October 1974 Ingetraut Dahlberg

https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-1974-2-59 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY