
Editorial

New Uses for Old Schemes

Whoever predicted 15 years ago that the old classification schemes like the UDC or the DDC would soon be dead, was wrong. The development of computer technology has now opened up new possibilities for the accessibility of information through online facilities by which such old schemes can be implemented very effectively in modern information systems as, in fact, any classification system can support a search immensely a) whenever information in books or other documents has been classed correctly by such systems and b) if such systems can be computerized to the full extent of their possibilities.

It was already possible in the last issue of this journal to conclude from the article by Otto OBERHAUSER ("Classification in Online Information Systems") that classification does indeed play a very helpful role in online systems. In K.MARKEY's contributions in this issue we learn about her research in which she compares the effectiveness of a search in an online catalogue containing DDC-numbers with one that had subject headings. This research was possible because already some parts of the DDC had been computerized for the purpose of printing the 20th edition. Thus the entries on the tapes had only to be extended by a formatting of classes and any additional information about their syndetics into fields for computer input in order to become the tool which could be used in subsequent searches of catalogued material classed by DDC and assigned with subject headings such as the MARC tapes. Although the experiments could only be conducted in a few selected areas, it can be expected that these studies will have paved the way for a full implementation of such search tools in the near future. (We would like to advise our readers to consider K.Markey's statement during the FID/CR panel discussion (see p.154) before reading her article, as the latter describes only a specific problem of the whole research project.)

Dewey's idea to let the class numbers of his system depict hierarchical relationships, or, in other words, to use an expressive notation allowing the user to move upwards and downwards along the chain of classes in a search, shows again convincingly the "power of the decimal notation" and its ease of use as compared with an enumerative notation of the kind utilized in the Library of Congress Classification with a notation composed of letters and blocks of numbers where each number has only the meaning which is given by its correlation to its verbal description. Admittedly, however, we must sometimes also turn a blind eye when some DDC hierarchies are somewhat beyond the possibilities of true hierarchical relationships.

It can also be expected that the younger daughter of the DDC, the UDC, although already an old lady of almost 90, kept alive and dynamic by intensive revision work, will equally be prepared for such an online utilization in the near future, since the new English Medium Edition has also been put on tape and has been printed by computer typesetting procedures. Our Indian colleagues, Amitabha CHATTERJEE and Gobinda G.CHOUDHURY, have carefully studied this new International Medium Edition (BS1000M) in its printed form and report on their findings in this issue. Formerly they had only known and used the abridged edition (BS1000A) which had remained unchanged for the past twenty years. Quite naturally they are concerned about some new features found, forgetting that the revision of the UDC is a continuous process controlled by FID, with the results published annually in "Extensions and Corrections to the UDC". For some time now changes have gradually been brought about in the many published fascicules of the English Full Edition so that the English speaking UDC world ought to have been familiar with most of them. Nevertheless the article still seemed a valuable contribution, especially for every non-UDC specialist, and shows again the great versatility of this old scheme and its superiority over any other universal classification system a) because of its ability to provide classes for concepts much more detailed than the book level as it had been enlarged since 1896 in order to serve the documentation of scientific articles and reports, and b) because of its structure which allows the expression of most complex subjects in a very succinct, easily discernible and computer reproducible way.

We are very happy that somebody who, as early as 1967/68 tested the usefulness of the UDC in online searches, viz. Pauline Atherton COCHRANE together with Robert FREEMAN, in a project called AUDA-CIOUS, received the Ranganathan Award of 1986 - see the citation in this issue (p.156) - not just for this project which was not only 'audacious', but also very clever and showing great foresight - but for her recent book on "Redesign of Catalogs and Indexes for Improved Online Subject Access" which is reviewed in this issue by our Dutch colleague, Gerhard RIESTHUIS (p.168).

May our future work - as far as it still depends on the success which Dewey brought to our field with his classification system - prosper as we gratefully accept the constructive work of those many colleagues who have striven to improve its contents and structure, and as we try to utilize its versions in searching for requested information and displaying the knowledge manifested in them.

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