

Book Review

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Sears List of Subject Headings, 23rd ed./ edited by Violet B. Fox. Amenia, New York: H. W. Wilson, a subsidiary of the Grey House Publishing, 2022, A-66, 1079p. ISBN: 978-1-63700-307-7 (Hardcover).

This is a second edition in a row published by the Grey House, Amenia, which acquired the H.W. Wilson Company, its original publisher, from the EBSCO Information Services in 2014. The latter had acquired the H.W. Wilson Company with its flagship, *Sears List*, only three years earlier in 2011, after the publication of its 20th edition (2010). Also, its redoubtable editor Dr. Joseph Miller retired the following year in December 2012. His retirement more than a decade ago has created a vacuum, if not a crisis. The H.W. Wilson Company with its imprint continues to be a research content provider for social and historical sciences, and thus a source of the literary warrant for the new editions of *Sears*. The change of the owning publishers has adversely effected its editorial stability and traditional excellence in standards, though not the punctuality of its publishing. It is so much so that the present edition has been edited by an outsourced editor, Violet B. Fox, nevertheless an experienced knowledge organization (KO) and metadata expert across the domain (she was earlier a senior editor of the Dewey Decimal Classification). She was contracted to do the job in a limited period.

It is not a miracle, but a sign of its inner strength that the *Sears List* has survived a full century of turbulence in KO. It has gone from strength to strength by easily and smoothly adapting to the changing information organization and access environment. The *Sears List* has become synonymous with subject cataloguing in small and medium libraries, and a handy tool for teaching subject cataloguing in library schools. It personifies C. A. Cutter's time-tested principles for subject indexing.

The year 2023 is the centennial year of its birth. Perhaps due to changing owners, and the collateral editorial vacuum, no program could be planned for celebrating this historical occasion. This otherwise could have been an appropriate occasion to showcase its contribution and a prompt to review the trends in subject access in less large libraries.

This edition is a continuation of the earlier edition (2018). The previous edition had only 1056 textual pages vis-à-vis 1079 of this edition, whereas there is no change in the numbers of prefatory pages and content. As officially stated, there are about 8,000 established terms and 500 sub-

divisions. It is no gainsaying to remind that the *Sears List* like any other system in its class is more a machine to churn out a huge number of subject headings than a mere register of limited vocabulary listed therein.

In the new edition prominent newly emerged subjects such as **Covid-19** have been incorporated. There are in all twenty-one new headings (p. A-57). Apart from two bare entries on **Covid-19**, the most important is the replacement of "Blacks" with **Black people** with attendant subdivisions. There could have been headings on the impact of pandemic on social, economic conditions and education delivery. It is obvious that in places it is too specialized with headings like **Film posters** (p.401), but some important and commonplace topics such as "Demonetization" have not been mentioned.

Not much can be described in view of minimal changes or additions in this edition. However, here are a few glitches spotted at random, perhaps most of these due to its hurried preparation. For example, among the newly incorporated headings listed (at p. A-57) is **Masks (Medical)** which however does not appear in the main list. The heading "Video-phones" though deleted in the new edition has no mention in the text with any historical note. **Husband abuse** has no RT for **Wife abuse** and vice-versa, though both the headings have been listed. **Index** has no BT for Information retrieval. Further, why the heading **Etiquette** is related only to **Letter writing** is not clear.

But the most serious error is that the old-fashioned denotation of periods such as B.C. and A.D. continues e.g. **India--History--324 B. C. - 1000 A. D.** (p.516) which should have been **India--History--324 B.C.E - 1000 C.E.** It is perhaps the only instance of this old-fashioned way of describing ancient or modern periods in the List. Another term "Future life" (p.437) is an unusable heading printed in light typeface but has a full entry which is also fully though correctly repeated under **Afterlife** (p.21). There are some serious misprints, which may be corrected at least in the online version, e.g. **Indian languages** (p.516) is given the DDC numbers 941.4 –which is a class number for British history. The heading **Indians--West Indies** (p.517) is confusing and looks odd as the term Indians is now used for East Indians only.

The heading **Impotence** has BT **Disease**, which should have been more specific with **Sexual disorders** (p.897). Dialects of any language are always place specific, but there is no provision to divide the heading "English language--Dia-

lects” by geographic place. It is suggested to the Sears List editors to permit its division by place to have headings like “English language--Dialects--Yorkshire” or “French language—Dialects--Quebec”. Similarly, the subdivision **Foreign words and phrases** should have been permitted division by the source language to have headings like **English language-- Foreign words and phrases--French** for a subject like “Use of French words in the English language”. Such a provision exists in the Dewey Decimal Classification. The Sears editors may consider incorporating this provision in the next revision.

The Dewey numbers are stated to be taken from the 15th Abridged Edition (2012) whereas the Abridged versions of the DDC no longer exist independently. The print Abridged Dewey is no longer published, and the electronic version has been merged with the full WebDewey suggesting points in the class numbers for truncation for small libraries. It has not been mentioned whether the Sears editors have used WebDewey, or are continuing with an old print Abridged Edition. This information is important for MARC records in libraries copying these DDC numbers.

The bibliography of twenty references (pp. A-48-49) is quite dated, the most recent being of 2010, much earlier than the previous edition of 2014. Even a core book¹ on the Sears list, with which the Grey House was quite familiar, has not been included in the bibliography. The said book has an almost exhaustive bibliography of publications on Sears, and also lists references on natural language based subject access, and metadata. These are a few pinpricks stumbled upon at random. It is time the whole list should be edited for syndetic structure. Nevertheless the new edition is welcome for its continuation and punctuality through troubled times.

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1. M.P. Satija. 2020. *Users Guide to the Sears List of Subject Headings*. 2nd ed. Lenham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.