

Book Review

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Sears List of Subject headings – 20th ed /ed by Joseph Miller; Susan McCarthy, Associate Editor. New York; Dublin: The H.W Wilson Co, 2010, liii, 847p. ISBN 978-0-8242-1105-9 (Hb)

The 20th edition of the celebrated Sears List (1sted.1923) published in June 2010 sets a new cycle of three year revision. Earlier it was three and a half years to synchronize with the publication of the new edition of the Abridged Dewey revised after every seven years. In the days of constantly updated WebDewey, it is no more a constraint. For the first time Sears List has been released simultaneously in online database format accessible to licensed subscribers. Responding to the environmental changes the basic edition is the online one whose content is designed in MARC authority. Print edition is now a derivative of the MARC data. The editors keep tabs on the changing information seeking behavior of users and how OPACs are accessed; yet the editors or the publishers never discuss the mechanisms of designing a new edition.

The new edition features more than 300 new subject headings suggested by librarians from different types of libraries, vendors of bibliographic records, indexers and subject specialists at the H.W. Wilson Company. Every new edition incorporates advances in vocabulary control, changing approaches of library users for subject access and even in the worldwide use of the English language. Each edition of the Sears List strengthens and continues the policies and consolidates the reforms that began with the 15th edition (1994). It is indeed an era of innovations in Sears. The latest knowledge from information science and information seeking behavior has been deployed to modernize the internal structure and grammar of the Sears List. Continuing adaptation constitutes the key to its success and popularity in the shifting sands of the information-seeking behavior of users. But the List is still a living manifestation of the principles of subject cataloguing put forth by C.A. Cutter (1837-1903).

As knowledge advances and new topics appear every day, the literature and publications on these emergent topics require new subject headings. This

edition features more than 300 new subject headings, a majority of them in the emerging areas of ecology and environment. Some newly added subject headings in these areas are: rain forest ecology, grassland ecology, climate change and sustainable agriculture. Research on dinosaurs has needed new headings such as on Raptorex, and more. Inevitably the other new headings are in the areas of virtual social networking with subject headings like Facebook and Twitter. Hypertext has been fine-tuned to Hyperlinks. A full list of cancelled and revised headings has been given at page xlv of the List.

A significant revision brings materials under the subject heading 'Russia' which were scattered under Soviet Union, Commonwealth of Independent States, and Russian (Federation). But more significant for Indians is replacement of the cumbersome SH East Indian. These new Indian subject headings, which are ahead of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, whom it follows traditionally, have been enthusiastically received by the Subject Analysis Committee of the ALA. Accordingly, this move allows space and method to create new Subject headings for adjectival topics on India, such as Indian art, Indian epic poetry, Indian Literature (English) and many more. It also replaces the obsolete term Indic. This is in addition to the Indian headings to be formulated by following the key headings. However the NTs and BTs under some of these headings are not correct of which the Sears editors are quite aware and have posted corrections as 'Errata and revision' on their Web catalogue <www.hwwilson.com/print/errata.cfm>.

On this reviewer's (Satija 2008) suggestion, made in a review of Sears-19 (2007), a new SH **Indian philosophy** has been coined but it has not been related with the SH **Hindu philosophy**. Nor there is any guidance or scope note to distinguish between these two closely related headings.

Notes play a critical role in correct applications of a subject heading. In this edition about 1400 notes have been revised to permit a subject heading to be divided geographically, offering detailed reasons for the geographical subdivisions of headings. Now geographic

subdivisions can be used to subdivide any heading (with or without instructions) provided it is not absurd. For example, **Bible films--India** makes sense for a publication on Bible films made in India, whereas a Subject heading **Dreams -India** is a nonsense subject heading. Additional scope notes have also been given so that some headings in the List, if so desired, may be used for individual works and collection as well as for materials about a topic such as 'Picture books for children'. This subject heading can be used in the following three hypothetical ways:

How to write illustrated books for children.
A History of India in pictures for Children.
A Picture book of Aesop's fables.

A new but superfluous feature is the enumeration of names of countries and then instructing to divide like the key heading U.S., for example,

New Zealand 993

May be subdivided like United States except for history

There is absolutely no need of such country headings. Moreover this addition is not exhaustive. Nepal does not appear in the List, nor does say Afghanistan. On the other hand the List still remains weak in non-US subjects. For example, NATO is there but not the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation).

Further in my previous review of Sears-19 I had suggested more key headings. For example, Bible has seventy headings, but Vedas is a loner. Most of the Biblical phrased or subdivided headings can easily be transferred to other sacred books and scriptures. On the analogy of Bible we can have headings like **Vedas in literature**, **Vedic cosmology**, or **Women in Bhagvadgita**, **Mahabharat plays**, **Ramayana---Parables**. But a simple authorization from the editors will encourage creation of such headings, which are urgently needed.

Carrying the issue further, we could make every preferred heading a potential Key Heading for all its NIs. This suggestion is based on the principle that what is true of a family is also true of its offspring:

Phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny. This is like genetic transmission of traits from parents to children. For example, from the **SH Flowers** we could drive SHs:

Roses-India
Roses-Drying,
Rose arrangement
Roses in art, or even
Artificial roses

Applying this principle will enormously enhance the capacity of the List without adding even an iota to its text or bulk. Awaited is the permission from the editors.

To summarize, as usual the List continues to provide complete guidance for the subject cataloguers for the maintenance of catalogues, for addition of new headings, and revision of the old ones. Its Introduction is clear and well illustrated, so much so that not only it is an illustrated operational manual to the Sears but also a concise textbook to teach principles and theory of the subject headings. Due to its affordable price and portability it is used to teach basics of subject headings in first year of Knowledge Organization courses. It also acts as an excellent and easy index to the DDC (Weihs 2004). The new edition should be welcome both for subject cataloguers and for teachers of subject cataloguing work.

References

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