Book Reviews

COMAROMI, John P., SATIJA, M.P.: **Dewey Decimal Classification: History and Current Status.** New Delhi: Sterling Publ. 1989. VI,178p., ISBN 81-207-0867-9

With the DDC having meanwhile reached its 20th edition (1), the importance of this classification system no longer being subject to any doubt and even the use of online catalogs already being tested, one warmly welcomes a book like the present one - an introduction to the formation history and development of the DDC, supplementing an earlier book by the same team of authors (2). What makes one even more gratified is the fact that one of the authors, J.P.Comaromi, is the DDC's current editor. After all, the never-abating discussion around quality and structuring principles of the DDC is still reverberating in many a one's ears (3) and brings back to mind phrases like B.Buchanan's: *"We no longer subscribe to the conspiracy theory - that a heavily disguised member of the LC classification office has infiltrated the DC office, and is engaged in sabotage"* (4), which are to some extent in conflict with the following qualification found in the text reviewed: *"The DDC is not the same as it was when created eleven decades ago. It has undergone constant changes, opened itself to latest developments in classification and information science"* (p.75).

Such remarks foster a certain spirit of expectation, which this reviewer, for one, does not find met, however, in every respect - and this applies particularly to the system's alleged openness to latest developments within classification theory. One learns a great many details concerning the policy that was behind the publication of the various editions (and which - what else could one expect - frequently was a mixture of a desire for change and a predilection for abiding by traditional structures so as not to confront users with too many novelties), a great deal about the importance of the current publishing company for the DDC, and about the dissemination of the system. Less careful attention was paid, however, in this reviewer's view, to the question of how to deal with classification-theoretical questions of structrure. Thus, for example, the authors deal quite liberally with the concept of faceting, creating thereby the impression of wishing to claim the advantages of modern concept formation and terminology without being able to really integrate the requirements resulting therefrom into the system. For, strict faceting requires the pre-defining of facets and finally the breaking-up of precombined structures formed from components of these facets; this is not yet the case with the DDC, not even in its 20th edition, nor can it probably be the case at all, the users to be served being who they are. Interestingly, an analogous approach can be noted with the editors of the Universal Decimal Classification; as divergent as the respective developments of these two related systems have been, in this respect they are quite similar.

Rather than being original throughout, the contents of this book revert in some parts to contributions already published elsewhere. A few minor duplications notwithstanding, there is no reason to regret this approach; on the contrary, something would be lacking in the entire context if these parts had not been reprinted along once again. More irritant, in comparison, is the fact that the text is not a clear-cut presentation of the historical development or of the current status; rather, a frequent alteration of the mode of presentation can be noted in that at times a great deal is taken for granted, while at other times particular points are explained in great detail.

Presented in the various chapters are: a short biography of Melvil Dewey; origin and spreading of the system; cultivation and revision of the system; and composition, components, structure and application of the system.

As already suggested by the person of the second author, the questions treated are presented with special emphasis on the application of the DDC in Indian libraries, as well as on the influence which certain problems connected with this application (cue: the originally strong emphasis on the Occidental cultural orbit in the shaping of the DDC's classes and structure: WASPish bias) have had on the further development of the DDC. The raising of this problem has the effect that, from a competent source, a great deal of information is presented here which in this concise form is not so easily accessible elsewhere. However, a reader at home in the sphere of influence of the Universal Decimal Classification or of its offshoots in a variety of languages may well regret the fact that this latter development was not granted an equal measure of attention.

It may also well be regretted that a few wholly new approaches did not receive even more attention, as they will undoubtedly impress their mark on future developments: the use of data processing for the cultivation and revision of the classification systen, the possibility connected therewith of relating the system to data carriers so as to easily feed it into local catalogs, and - owing to the structure-reproducing notation - the developments around the utilization of the system for online retrieval purposes (5). It would have been interesting to learn, for example, whether any conclusions have already been drawn from the retrieval experiements with respect to the structuring of the classification systen, particularly in the domain of precombined structures, or whether any thought has already been given to a changing of the handling of the auxiliaries for retrieval purposes.

Now that the 20th edition has appeared, the chapter specially devoted to it can certainly claim an interest of its own as a background to this edition.

Three annexes, finally, deserve particular mentioning and highlighting:

1. A tabellary overview of the various editors/publishers of the DDC.
2. a chronological survey of the formation and subsequent development of the DDC classification system together with a biography of Melvil Dewey;
3. a 527-title index of literature on the DDC, not updated until 1989, however, but essentially only until

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1985 (with 11 more titles being mentioned for 1986 and 1987 combined) Winfried Gödert

References and Notes:

(1) Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index. Devised by Melvil Dewey. Ed.20 by John P.Comaromi. Vol.1-4. Albany, N.Y.: Forest Press/OCLC 1989.
(2) Comaromi, J.P., Satija, M.P.: Introduction to the practice of Dewey Decimal Classification. New Delhi: Sterling Publ. 1987.
(3) (cf. the presentation in pertinent textbooks, e.g.:) Foskett, A.C.: The subject approach to information. 4thed. London: Bingley 1982. p.313-348 (or in various contributions, e.g.: Foskett, A.C.: Better dead than read: further studies in critical classification. Libr.Resources & Techn.Serv. 28(1984) p.346-359
(4) Buchanan, B.: Theory of library classification. London: C.Bingley 1979. p.33
(5) (with regard to this question, too, there is, interestingly, a parallel development among the users of the UDC at the library of the ETH Zürich, cf.for example:) Funk, H., Loth, K.: Subject retrieval in ETHICS on the basis of the UDC: an OPAC. (Orig.in German). In: Wissensorganisation im Wandel. Proc.11th Annual Conf.of the Soc.for Classif., Aachen, 1987. Frankfurt: Indeks Verl.1988. p.43-47.

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KEMP, D.Alasdair: **Computer-Based Knowledge Retrieval.** London: ASLIB 1988: X,399p. ISBN 0-85142-221-7

Methods of information storage and retrieval are no longer conceivable today without the use of computers. Nevertheless there is in the pertinent scientific literature a dearth of titles presenting in a competent and comprehensive way, and a way conforming to the present state of the art, both the methodical side of knowledge organization and the possibilities now existing in the field of data technology - hence of titles paying due attention both to the aspects of information retrieval by means of telecommunication with external literature data banks and to those of subject-oriented enquiries in library online catalogs for the general public. Precisely such an attempt is undertaken in the present book by D.Alasdair Kemp. As was only to be expected from such an attempt, the result achieved presents both strengths and weaknesses.

To start out right away with a few weaknesses: for several stretches on end the data-technological side is emphasized so much that the book might well also have been given the title of 'Knowledge-based information processing'. In itself this is not a shortcoming, but it becomes a weakness - and this regrettably must be noted with respect to the entire book when the demands imposed on the reader's prior knowledge vary widely: sometimes comparatively elementary matters are explained in great detail (e.g. when in a section entitled 'Data Organization and Retrieval Software' basic concepts of data technology down to *online* and *offline* are explained), while at other times something in the nature of a literature overview is presented which, for a proper fitting-in of the problems described, requires considerable prior knowledge (e.g. when on p.117-118 reference is made to special programming languages for Artificial Intelligence). Both approaches can be justified; the mixture of them attempted here, however, falls just short of the mark: the text wavers between the level of an introductory textbook and that of a literature report, thus, depending on the reader's prior knowledge, boring him at times and overtaxing or disappointing him at other times.

After the introduction there follows a chapter on users which deserves to be put into relief. Focusing, in its analysis, on the requirements imposed by the ultimate users on a retrieval system, it contains on p.125 a presentation of an 'Ideal Information Retrieval System'. This analysis, still rather sketchy at this point, is later reverted to and presented in greater detail in chapter 11 'Ideal Systems', which fact possibly should have been brought out more clearly. In this early part of the book, some of the requirements are still left somewhat hanging in the air; thus, e.g., aspects of the shaping of user surfaces are introduced only in chapter 8 and cannot yet be included in the considerations at this point.

The book's predominant orientation to information *technology* finds expression in its further division into chapters. There follows a chapter on 'Data Organization and Retrieval Software' before attention is paid, in the next one, to 'Knowledge Representation'. This approach would be justifiable if in the discussion of the methodological questions the data-technological realization aspect were always and immediately treated as well. This, however, is not consistently the case, so that both chapters are too rigorously separated from each other.

In the ensuing chapters 'Expert Systems and Artificial Intelligence' and 'Databse Management Systems' a number of tools and aids in the field of data technology are presented (causing this presentation to have a high value of its own, not being duplicated as it is in this form anywhere else in the literature). However, the intimate connection with the methodological problems of knowledge might well have been brought out more clearly; in particular one regrets the absence of more clear-cut statements on the use and usefulness of Artificial Intelligence procedures in the fields of information storage and retrieval. For another thing, even the presentation of the methodological questions is divided into two parts: while the aforementioned chapter 4 on Knowledge Representation is strongly oriented, in its contents, to the *Representation of Knowledge* in computers, problems of knowledge representation from viewpoints antedating the advent of data technology follow in a chapter 10 'Controlled Vocabularies for Computer-Based Retrieval', in which the well-known documentation languages are presented.

Both the placing of these subjects at so late a point in the book and the carrying-through of the discussion leave a few wishes open in this chapter, so that the desirable dovetailing of the factors: *properties* of documentation languages and their *suitability* for a *special* retrieval component form does not become clear, as can be seen e.g. on p.253 where instead of a differentiated discussion of terminology control measures merely one lone example and some literature references are given, or when, again on p.253, the problems of post-coordinating retrieval according to pre-combined structures are

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