

Reviews

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Vanda Broughton. 2015. *Essential Classification*, 2nd ed. London: Facet Publishing. ISBN 978-1-78330-031-0, £49.95.

Since the late 1980s, library classification has been passing through its second revolution. The first one, which began in the 1950s, waned in the 1970s with the coming of computers and electronic databases. But some brave hearts like S.R. Ranganathan, the Classification Research Group (CRG) members, Jesse Shera, and some others never lost faith in the need and power of classification for information organisation and retrieval in any environment. The worldwide web has not only given it a new lease on life, but also new claws and teeth to bounce back with a vengeance.

The thoughts and fruits culled from this new renaissance are succinctly encapsulated in the second edition of *Essential Classification* (first published in 2004). The professed objective of this book is to describe (1): “some of the systems which people have created for organising information.” Its emphasis is on “how to classify” information as recorded in variant media, including electronic and networked resources. It has 23 chapters, including a brief introduction, a glossary, and a classified bibliography. The table of contents is analytical and enumerates all the sub-topics discussed within a chapter. The entire text can be broadly divided into four sections.

The first section (chapters 1-9) is on the theoretical bearings, need, purpose, and methods of classification in general. However the two-page second chapter on “Need of Classification” is too scanty. There is no act which doesn’t need classification. The third chapter “First Principle of Classification” mostly dwells on the faceted mode rather than the more basic one of genus-species relation and acts of grouping, dividing, ranking, correlating or mapping, which underlie every classification process. The rest of the chapters of this section deal with subject analysis and the features of library classification systems.

The second section (chapters 10-13) dwells on the natural language approach to knowledge organisation and representation for access with controlled vocabulary. It sufficiently explains the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* in two chapters, devoting one each respectively to the underlying principles and practice, with many apt examples

to apply the system. There is no chapter on the *Sears List of Subject Headings* (now in its twenty-first edition, 2014), which is very popular in small- and medium-sized libraries in English- and Spanish-speaking countries. No description of specialised subject headings such as *Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)* or the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT)* leaves this section somewhat incomplete. Since the natural language approach to knowledge organisation (KO) is considered more complex and sophisticated than the systematic classification for shelf arrangement methods and systems, this section could have better been placed after the virtual section 4 (chapters 14-20) which dwells on the theory and practice of traditional library classification systems mostly employed for shelf arrangement.

In section 4, two chapters each have been apportioned to Library of Congress *Classification (LCC)*, *Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)*, and Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), discussing the principles in the first and their practice in the second respectively. The emphasis is on how to classify information as recorded in varied media, keeping the theory to the bare minimum only to explain the rationale behind their practice. It aptly states (2): “nobody learned classifying documents by any means other than doing it, and certainly not by reading about the philosophic principles of X or Y classifications.” Indeed you do not plunge into a deep pool to learn swimming only by reading a book. Chapter 14 of this section explains the common anatomical features and functional components of library classification systems. The next chapter dwells on classification administration, discussing topics like the choice of a classification, cost of classification, sources of classification for copy cataloguing or outsourcing classification. It also discusses the question of general versus special classifications, on which the debate is still inconclusive. Chapter 22 is exclusively devoted to the history, features, and methods of faceted classification, which have already been discussed here and there in the preceding text. The book closes with the state of the art chapter on features, prospects, and applications of classification in the digital environment within and outside the library. It concisely discusses online classification systems, classification for online browsing and searches, use of classification for organising the web and topics like information

architecture, visualising tools, ontologies and folksonomies. It is difficult to find at one place description of so many dimensions of classification in the digital environment. Its glossary (275-398), with little less than 250 terms, is very comprehensive, though technical terms are already explained wherever these occur for the first time in the book. Terms included in the glossary are printed in boldface throughout the text of the book. Different meanings of the term, if any, are itemized with numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. For example, “classification” has three such meanings.

The highly select bibliography misses some important references, though journal articles such as Slavic (2008) and Hjørland (2013) are too important to ignore. More than this, omission of Eric Hunter’s *Classification made simple*, which is now in third edition (2009), is an act of negligence, if not ignorance. Hunter’s conceptual and methodological approach is perfectly supplementary to the system approach of Professor Broughton. Also for the *DDC*, it prefers to list old and dated textbooks rather than the current ones. The fourth edition (1967) of Arthur Maltby’s classic textbook is mentioned instead of the fifth (1975/1978).

Each chapter divided into sections with headings provides more than one summary, one each for a major topic discussed. For example, chapter 21 on faceted classification (299-326) has seven skillfully crafted, itemized summaries for recapitulation and comprehension. Also, there are numerous exercises for the students in every chapter whose answers have been given at the end. But there are no references at the end of the chapters except the last chapter. No one has been quoted or cited! It means the book has been written mostly from experience and knowledge. Indeed, it makes the book smoothly readable. Studied with real examples, the titles chosen are apt and recent to illustrate their classification. These have been judiciously selected and fully described bibliographically, sometimes with pictures of the title pages. Quite often concepts have been showcased in boxes for visual effects to enhance the self-learning value of the book. Indeed it is a learning-centered book. Being up to date, it would be eminently useful as a teaching text, too. It has everything an average student of library classification may need to be informed and enlightened, and to get intrigued in the science and art of library classification—which indeed is “the most intellectually stimulating part of the professional curricula” (3).

However, the silver lining of this book has clouds, too. It begins with an axiomatic statement: “Classification is everywhere”—which is only superficially correct. In fact, classification is nowhere—in the aboriginal universe, there is only entropy everywhere. Classification is a human construct to bring order out of chaos (Satija 1998). It is

imposed, and therefore no classification is natural or universal. It is made to serve a purpose. This is what the book mentions later on page 15. Indeed it is needed everywhere for unraveling and simplifying the phenomena, as mentioned on page 13, that a Google search on classification returns more than 360,000,000 sites. The journey of homo sapiens from cave dwellers to space travellers has only been traversed by classifying encountered phenomena and experiences. On factual sides, BSI, London is no longer the publisher of English *UDC* as described on page 242. Open access multi-language *UDC* summaries are not really abridged editions, as mentioned on page 290. About a decade ago, a pocket edition (mentioned on page 309) was published in English and German and that now has been upgraded (or rechristened) as an abridged edition—the English edition of the latter will be published in late 2016.

Further, it seems self-contradictory on the *DDC* citation order by saying that at places “a sort of implicit or unofficial citation order comes into operation” (206). In the *DDC* citation order there is nothing unofficial; the classifier has no choice but only to follow what is instructed or ruled. It of course has clearly been admitted later the author when she suggests (207): “The most important thing to remember with *DDC* is to follow the instructions in the schedule, and not to look for general rules.” However, as a matter of general policy of late, the *DDC* has openly adopted a preferred order, which it calls the “table of last resort” (*DDC* 2011, 1): 1) kinds of things, 2) parts of things, 3) materials, 4) properties of things, 5) processes, 6) operations, and 7) instruments. Evidently it is the one formulated by the CRG and which is also the most popular. More seriously, the definition of the term “array” is quite ambiguous. Simply speaking, an array is a set of equally ranked, predictively arranged, entities having a common genus. By this definition, examples of arrays from *CC* and *UDC* (310) are not strictly arrays, but arrays and chains mixed up.

On page 322 it is wrongly mentioned that the Ranganathan’s *CC* does not follow the inversion principle. It surely does. Facets in the *PMEST* are in concrete to abstract order, but the documents are filed in general to specific order on the shelves. This is done by assigning reversed ordinal value to the indicator digits of the categories. Of the five indicator digits the one for T has the lowest value, while that of P has the highest. For example, on the shelves “Libraries in 20th century” (2’N) files before “Libraries in the US” (2.73), which in turn precedes “Classification in libraries” (2:51). Latter will be followed by “Academic libraries” (23) and “Classification in academic libraries” (23:51) and “Classification in the 20th century academic libraries” (23:51’N) and “Classification in the US academic libraries” (23:51.73).