

Brief Communication:

Enhancing the Subject Headings Minting Capacity of the Sears List of Subject Headings: Some Suggestions

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ABSTRACT: *Sears List of Subject Headings* (Miller and McCarthy 2010), first published in 1923, is now in its 20th edition. Like most subject headings lists, apart from being a list of preferred (and non-preferred) headings, it also provides patterns, clear instructions, and examples for coining new subject headings not explicitly listed. Key headings form a vital part of the system of coining new headings. It is proposed that more key headings should be designated. Some candidate headings are described. One far-reaching provision seems to be the use of a subdivision of a preferred heading with all of its NTs. Thus, every preferred heading is a potential key heading for all of its NTs. This proposal works on the principle that what is true of a class is true of its narrower classes of all types. Applying this principle will enormously enhance the capacity of the *List* without adding even an iota to its text and size.

“It is only by being flexible and expandable that Sears has been able over the years to fill the needs of various kinds of libraries” (Miller and McCarthy 2010, x).

Sears List of Subject Headings, first published in 1923, is now in its 20th edition (Miller and McCarthy 2010). In about nine decades of its healthy life, it has survived changing fads in providing subject access to library collections. Now it has firmly established itself as a tool for creating subject authorities in small and medium libraries. Not only this, due to its handy size, affordable price, and clearly stated and illustrated principles of subject headings, it is equally being used to teach the theory and practice of subject headings in library schools (Weihs 2004).

Like most subject heading lists, apart from being a list of preferred (and non-preferred) headings, it also

provides patterns, clear instructions, and examples for coining new subject headings not explicitly listed. This has clearly been stated in the preface of the *Sears* (Miller and McCarthy 2010, x):

No list can possibly provide a heading for every idea, object, process, or relationship, especially not within the scope of a single volume. What Sears hopes to offer instead is a basic list that includes many of the headings most likely to be needed in small libraries together with patterns and examples that will guide the cataloguer in creating additional headings as needed. New to-

pics appear every day, and books on those topics require new subject headings. Headings for new topics can be developed from the Sears List. Instructions for creating new headings based on the pattern in Sears and sources for establishing the wording of new headings are given in the Principles of the Sears List.

Such hidden headings enormously outnumber the listed ones. This feature not only provides autonomy to the cataloguer, but also makes the operation of the list an intellectually stimulating task. No doubt, it is one of a few scholarly jobs in our profession.

There are three provisions the *Sears List* to coin new subject headings (xlii):

1. From the Key headings
2. From headings to be added by the cataloguer

The note here reads: “*Sears* is not intended to be a complete list of subject headings but only a list of the many of the most commonly used headings and a pattern for creating other headings as needed. Types of things and names of individual things must always be added when they are not already provided in the List (xlii).”

3. The third category is SA instructions, which, in fact, helps to precipitate the omitted headings whenever and wherever needed.

These are standardized and commonplace provisions with which a skilled cataloguer is already familiar. So these will not be elaborated here. Nevertheless, these provisions make *Sears* a subject headings spinning machine.

The *Sears* has always encouraged the formulation of new headings as clear from the following assertion (xliii):

The Sears List is unique among subject heading lists in that it does not attempt to be a complete list of terms used in any single library but only a list of headings most likely to be needed in a typical small library and a skeleton or pattern for creating other headings as needed. By using the Sears List as a foundation, the cataloguer in a small library can develop a local authority list that is consistent in form and comprehensive for that library. This has proven over the years to be a practical and economical solution to the cataloging needs of small libraries.

Because the Sears List is not a complete authority list, the cataloguer using the Sears List must take an active part in developing a larger vocabulary of terms. As an aid in this process we offer the ... discussion of the basic principles of subject analysis and the construction and control of subject headings.

In addition to the explicit provision, there are some odd and not-much-exploited provisions in the *Sears List* to coin new headings. For example, in the entry **Education** (253), it is clearly instructed: “Subdivisions listed under this heading may be used under other education headings where applicable.” With this permission, we can have headings like:

Co education—Curricula—India
Co education—Developing Countries
Elementary education—Aims and objectives

What is more important and which is not stated is that where **Education** is a subdivision, then other types of education should also be allowed to be used as subdivision. If allowed, we can easily have the following headings:

Women—Special education
Women—Technical education
Blind—Vocational education
Prisoners—Adult education
Prisoners—Vocational education

This provision should also be extended to phrase headings to coin new headings. For example, **Radio in education** can be used as a pattern to have meaningful headings such as:

Radio in adult education
Radio in continuing education
Radio in family life education
Radio in health education
Radio in moral education
Television in physical education

Thus numerous headings can be coined for different types of education.

Under the heading **Libraries** (450), there is no such provision to use its subdivisions for other types of libraries. But on the analogy of **Education**, we could use the subdivisions under **Libraries** for other types of libraries. From the subject heading **Libraries—Special collections**, we can derive headings such as

Academic libraries—Special collections

Which can be further extended as per instructions:

Academic libraries—Special collection—Science fiction

Academic libraries—Special collection—Video tapes

Academic libraries—Automation—India

Church libraries—Censorship

Special libraries—Equipment and supplies

Children's libraries—Acquisitions

Extending it further, phrase headings can be coined by replacing the term “library” with the type of the library. From the heading **Library architecture**, we can derive headings such as:

Academic libraries architecture—India

Academic libraries catalogues

Academic libraries cooperation

Academic libraries finance

Academic libraries resources

Academic libraries services

Academic libraries surveys

It may be noted that, in these phrase headings, the plural form has been used in conformity with the existing heading **Academic libraries**. Of course, many more technically correct headings can be coined by innovative and enterprising cataloguers and entered in the local authority list.

One wonders why the subdivisions provided under **President—United States** cannot be applied to **Vice-president**. If allowed, we can easily coin headings like:

Vice-presidents—United States—Appointment

Vice-presidents—United States—Election

Vice-presidents—United States—Family

Vice-presidents—United States—Home

Vice-presidents—United States—Nomination

Vice-presidents—United States—Protection

We can even have headings like **Vice-presidents' spouses**. Of the geographical subdivision, the US can be replaced with any other appropriate country, e.g.,

Vice-presidents—India—Election

Key headings form a vital part of the system of coining new headings. This short list (xliii) has been taken

for a long time. It would be time to identify and designate more key headings. Some candidate headings for such elevated positions are obvious. **Bible** has about seventy headings, whereas **Koran** has only two, and **Vedas** is a loner. Most of the Biblical phrase headings or subdivisions can be smoothly transferred to other scriptures. If **Bible** is made a key heading, then its topical subdivisions can easily be transferred to other scriptures. On this permission, we can have headings like:

Vedas—Astronomy

Vedas—Commentaries

Vedas—Inspiration

Vedas—Parables

Vedas—Use

Extending this to **Koran**, we can have

Koran—Antiquities

Koran—Chronologies

Koran—Concordances

Koran—Evidences, authorities, etc.

Koran—Geography

Koran—History

Koran—Prophecies

This mutation can also be continued in phrase headings to have:

Vedas and science

Vedas and literature

Ramayana films

Koran in literature

Koran stories

Koranic cosmology

Vedic cosmology

And further:

Salvation—Koranic teaching

Family—Koranic teaching

By analogy with **Bible. NT**, we can have

Vedas. Rig Veda

Vedas. Sam Veda

Vedas. Athrava Veda

Vedas. Yajur Veda

That seems easy and hassle-free. The only need is to designate **Bible** as a key heading and beef it up with

more needed subdivisions. Another heading that seems to be of the caliber of key heading is **Napoleon I, Emperor of the French**.

One more far-reaching latent provision seems to be the use of a subdivision of a preferred heading with all of its NTs. We could treat every preferred heading as potential or local key heading for all of its NTs. For example, from the heading **Flowers**, we could coin:

Roses—United States
Roses—Drying
Roses—Arrangement
Roses in art

and even

Artificial roses

To use another example, under the heading **Houses** (382), the NTs *inter alia* are:

Apartment houses
Prefabricated houses
Solar houses

One of the topical subdivision of **Houses** is “**Buying and selling**,” which may further be divided geographically. Applying this principle, we can easily construct subject headings such as:

Apartment houses—Buying and selling
Apartment houses—Buying and selling—New York
Fabricated houses—Buying and selling
Solar houses—Buying and selling—New Delhi

To cite a few more examples on the basis of the listed **Computer Software Industry**, we can have headings like **Computer games industry**. And from **Journalism**, we can have

Broadcasting journalism—Objectivity
Reporters and reporting—Objectivity

This proposal works on the principle that what is true of a class is true of its narrower classes of all types. Systems of subject headings seem to follow the principle of phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny, or the transmission of genetic traits from parents to offspring.

Applying this principle will enormously enhance the capacity of the *List* without adding even an iota to its text and size. Awaited is a word of authorization from the editors for consistent use and uniformity. The only requirement of the editors is that they make this provision explicitly stated in the “Principles.”

References

- Miller, Joseph, ed., and McCarthy, Susan, assoc. ed. 2010. *Sears list of subject headings*. 20th ed. New York: H.W. Wilson Co.
- Weihs, Jean. 2004. Musings on an unscientific survey of Sears use. *Technicalities* 24n3: 5-7.