

Editorial

Classification – East or West?

This issue begins with an article by N.Meder: “Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Classification”, followed by M.P. Satija’s article on “Colon Classification. Literature Analysis 1970–1984”. There can be no greater difference than that between these two articles! The first expresses the search for the assistance which classification methods can offer in mastering the changing items of scientific recognition, the latter is so-to-speak a desperate call – based on evidence from current literature – for a change in the situation concerning the existence or non-existence of Ranganathan’s Colon Classification, the 7th edition of which has been announced again and again during the last 15 years. In Mr. Meder’s article we are reminded of the two contributions by A.J.N. Judge on “Functional Classification” (published in *Int.Classif.* 1984–2 and –3) in which he showed how a classification system could be made adaptable to changing situations in subject fields; however, it seems to us that such a system cannot as yet be used in libraries and for the bibliographical services in the big databanks as long as their objects are material items, the positions of which are determined by factors such as space and time. We would rather like to assume that those big database producers in the West of the USA are right who stated that they need to improve their services with regard to subject organization as the search for information in systems without such an organization of knowledge no longer seem to attract users. In other words, markets are lost where one works without classification and where the problems of synonyms in the widest sense (including the possibility to express a subject in many different versions) have a rather detrimental effect on precision and recall of a search and the patience of a customer. (Notabene: In the last issue of *Int.Classif.* a “Recommendation for Classification” was published on “Free Text in Information Systems” which treated just this topic.)

When one calls for classification both in the West and in the East, one would like to know which kind of classification or classification system is meant? Would the 7th ed. of the Colon Classification now announced for 1986 be the solution? In the new book by P.N. Kaula (“A Treatise on Colon Classification” - see also the book review by M.P. Satija in *Int. Classif.* 85–2) a preview on the 7th ed. is given (p. 249–251) together with a list of the new 137 main classes (instead of the former 31). When looking at this list, doubts arise whether this selection as well as its notation will be sufficiently attractive to win new users for this system. Using the procedure (propagated by Ranganathan) of intercalating new main classes into the existing notation by the help of so-called Emptying Digits X and Z, the additional 106 classes received notations which seem to make the system even less suitable for memorization and easy handling. As an example I would like to list the few main classes between L and N:

L*Z	Medical Sciences	M	Useful Arts
LT	Physical Exercises and Sports	MV	Military Science
		MX	Secretarial Practice

LTT	Ergonomics	MZ*Z	Humanities & Social Sciences
LU1	Social Medicine	MZ*ZZ	Humanities
LU5	Public Health	MZ	Mysticism & Spiritual Experiences
LUD	Medical Technology	MZX	Astrology
LX	Pharmacognosy	N*Z	Fine Arts
LY1	Nursing		
LYV	Medical Cybernetics		
LYX	Medical Jurisprudence		

Perhaps one would like to ask: Where has the beauty of the system gone? Is it necessary that in classification today ugliness must prevail as it does in many examples of modern art? Has order not something to do with harmony and symmetry? Can the organization of knowledge not also be carried out using means which are a joy to the beholder and user and which awaken in him a feeling of satisfaction or even pleasure?

When Ranganathan published his first scheme, it followed the APUPA-Pattern (Alien-Penumbral-Umbra-Penumbral-Alien), and the subject field “Mysticism and Spiritual Experience” was put at the peak of the climbing and falling beams of his 2x3x5 main classes. As it was outside the knowledge fields, he did not mark it with a letter from our alphabet but used the Greek capital “delta”. Of all of this, nothing seemed to have remained in the new 7th edition. Will it become the Colon Classification which Ranganathan would have elaborated with today’s knowledge, if he were still alive? I dare to doubt it. And I would like to add: just as India today seems – after a period of necessarily intense nationalism for the purpose of self-realization purposes after the negative experiences of colonialism – to open itself for the products of the West, it should also profit from the feedback which evolved from the application of Ranganathan’s faceted classification in European countries. In other words – and here I only repeat what Dr. Gopinath said time and again at the recent conference on “Ranganathan’s Philosophy” at New Delhi (see also the report in the section FID/CR News 15) – one should not follow Ranganathan’s words slavishly and literally but should act on and propagate, in the freedom of his spirit, what follows from having understood his teachings. He has given us a splendid theory of classification. It has been applied in many a Western system, traces of it can also be seen in PRECIS. With this latter indexing system an enormous thesaurus is developing at present, the descriptors of which are presumably related to the classes of the Dewey Decimal Classification. It would seem to me a worthy research project to compare relevant sections of this thesaurus and its relationships to the DDC with the respective sections of the newly devised 7th ed. of Colon Classification. The results of such an investigation should then lead to a (perhaps Unesco-sponsored?) elaboration of a new universal classification system with thesaurus features which could be used for an improved input and retrieval in all the existing databank systems – if the management agrees.

I would like to conclude that in our small world today, we should not decide on either East or West, but look for ways how East cum West or West cum East could cooperate, in any case, however, it should be in friendly openness, understanding and willingness of helping each other in a mutually appreciative give and take for the benefit of all of our colleagues and of the users of our systems!

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