Subject Headings and Classification Literature, 2008-2011

Introduction

This bibliographic essay discusses the subject headings and classification literature published between 2008-2011. The literature is large, so this essay focuses primarily on subject headings and classification topics related to libraries, especially standards for subject access, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), etc. It does not describe articles focused solely on theory, ontologies, thesauri, or indexing. There are three major themes in the literature during this time: treatment of people, subjects, and formats in the standards for subject access, implementation of alternative classification schemes, and the use of user tags/folksonomies to improve access to library materials. Each theme will be discussed, and then additional topics in the literature will be addressed.

Treatment of People, Subjects, and Formats

One major theme in the literature during this time is how standards for subject access treat people, subjects, and formats. Several articles address the treatment of people. Christensen (2008) looked at lesbianism and male homosexuality in LCSH and LCC. Johnson (2010) compared LCSH to three lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) thesauri, and suggests that LCSH make LGBT people and topics more visible. Beall (2009) argues that a “creative use” of DDC table 5 may help provide access to works about racially-mixed people. Lee (2011b) studied LCSH’s treatment of aboriginal materials and surveyed indigenous people about terms they would prefer.

There were also articles about religious topics. Marcus (2011) looked at the history of Sears Subject Heading changes for important topics in Judaic library collections. Sulistyo-Basuki and Mulyani (2008) took an historic look at efforts to revise 297 (Islam) in DDC. McTavish, Neal, and Wathen (2011) looked at the treatment of violence against women in the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and found that current discourse was embedded in the system. CannCasciato (2011) discussed the ethical issues of reclassifying a topic from religion to science.

Other topics include how standards treat various art and music topics, such as classifying fine art photography in LCC (Bunting and Matosian 2011), classifying fine art in LCC (Clarke 2011), classifying visual arts in DDC (Cripps 2011), and classifying moving image materials for music using LCC (Kinney 2009). Other articles focused on Canadian topics (Holley 2008, Weihs 2011), nonknowledge (Bernstein 2009), zoology (Blake 2011), and theses and dissertations (Wolverton, Hoover, and Fowler 2011). There also were several case studies about classifying philosophy in Italian academic institutions (e.g., Bettella et al. 2009; De Gaetano, Angelica and Fontanin 2009; Frigerio and Dalbagno 2009; Giampietro 2009; Manzi 2009).

Alternative Classification

Another theme in the literature during this time is using alternative classification schemes to improve access to library materials. Many articles suggest that public libraries should switch
from DDC to a bookstore model based on Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) categories. The articles argue that Dewey can be confusing for users and suggest that a bookstore model will help users find and use library materials. The first library to make the switch, in 2007, was the Perry Branch Library of the Maricopa County Library District in Arizona, and several articles published during this time follow its lead. Maker (2008) advocates using a “reader centered” approach (i.e., a bookstore model) rather than genres when organizing adult fiction in a public library. Fister (2009) discusses how public libraries are moving from Dewey to other arrangements, like BISAC, and Rice and Kolendo (2009) discuss experiences of the Frankfort Public Library District in Illinois that switched from Dewey to a homegrown scheme based on the Maricopa County scheme and BISAC codes. Hill (2010) discusses experiences of various public libraries who have switched from Dewey, and McGrath (2011) discusses experiences of public libraries in New York that switched from Dewey to a bookstore model. Stauffer (2008) takes a different approach and suggests that children’s collections can take advantage of both Dewey and a bookstore model by using broader Dewey numbers and installing signage with categories.

Other alternative classifications were discussed during this time as well. A Canadian elementary school library reclassified nonfiction from DDC to a homegrown scheme called “sur~!” (See. Use. Reshelve. Fast!) using broad topics (Gibson 2011). Houston (2008) found that 13% of school libraries in Kentucky (primarily elementary schools) used reading levels, like Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts, instead of DDC to classify materials. Newsom, Lundgren, and Poehlmann (2008) studied the use of genre headings for chemistry and engineering, and suggest genre headings should be created for other subjects, not just literature. See also Granata (2009).

User Tags/Folksonomies

A final theme in the literature is how user tags/folksonomies can enhance subject access to library materials. A folksonomy is a taxonomy created by the people (the folk) and refers to social/collaborative tagging. User tags were starting to be added to library catalogs during this time and there are several articles comparing tags on Del.icio.us, LibraryThing, etc. to subject headings (primarily LCSH). The overwhelming conclusion of the articles was that user tags and subject headings should be used together on library catalogs. Tags alone cannot replace the access provided by subject headings, but tags can help users find library materials. This is seen in articles such as Yi and Chan (2009) who linked folksonomy (i.e., user tags on Del.icio.us) to LCSH and found that both should be used for better information retrieval. Lyons and Tappeiner (2008) described how Hostos Community College in New York added user tags for video games and online resources to enhance subject cataloging. Rolla (2009) compared LibraryThing tags to LCSH and found that tags cannot replace a controlled vocabulary (e.g., LCSH), but both can be used to improve subject access in library catalogs. DeZelar-Tiedman (2011) looked at LibraryThing tags and LCSH subject headings and found that tags were broader than subject headings, but tags for popular fiction and classic works were not necessarily reflected in subject headings. She suggests that libraries consider supplementing the catalog with tags in certain areas. See also Lawson (2009), Peterson (2009), Porter (2011), Spiteri (2010), Steele (2009), Strader (2009), and Thomas, Caudle, and Schmitz (2009). For additional articles about

Other Topics

In addition to the major themes, other topics also were discussed in the subject headings and classification literature. Many articles looked at topics related to subject headings. Mann (2008) and McCutcheon (2009) compared keyword searching and controlled vocabulary and found that keyword searching cannot replace subject headings; they work together to provide access to library materials. Adamich (2008) discussed mapping education standards to LCSH in the school library catalog, Jin (2008) discussed Faceted Access Subject Headings (FAST), El-Sherbini and Chen (2011) discussed the need for non-Roman subject access in the library catalog, and Walsh (2011) looked at the use of LCSH in digital collections. Salaba (2009) studied end-user understanding of LCSH and found that LCSH was helpful to users, especially narrower terms, scope notes, and related terms.

Various topics related to classification were discussed as well. One topic was reclassification. Steele and Foote (2011) found that one third of ARL libraries performed reclassification projects despite the prevalence of e-book collections, and there were several case studies of reclassification (see e.g., Bright et al. 2011; Lin and Murphy 2010; Longstaff and Henry 2009; Wan 2009). In addition, Lambert (2011) discussed classification schemes for government publications, Beall and Mitchell (2010) discussed the history of DDC in the MARC format, and Green (2011) looked at see-also relationships in DDC. Several articles discussed other classification schemes such as the Universal Decimal Classification (see e.g., Broughton 2010; Colillas 2011; Frâncu and Sabo 2010; McIlwaine 2010; Nijhoff 2011; Slavic, Cordeiro, and Riesthuis 2008; Van Doorn and Polman 2010; White 2011), and Bliss Bibliographic Classification (see e.g., Biagetti 2009; Perkins 2011). There were also articles about classifying specific formats outside of standard tools, such as concert programs (Lee 2011a), images (Ménard 2009), and audiovisual materials (Turner 2010), and several articles looked at historic classification (see e.g., Lee and Lan 2011; Minter 2008; Olson 2010).

This essay looked at the subject headings and classification literature published between 2008 and 2011, and revealed a large literature focused on improving subject access for library users.
Bibliography


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