Abridging the UDC: the compiling of the Pocket Edition

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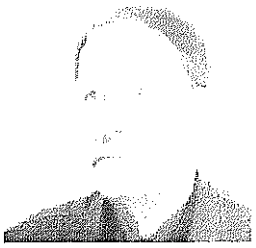

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ABSTRACT: Gives an account of the editing of Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) from the full database to produce a brief, simplified version. Describes the selection criteria, difficulties in maintaining consistency and insights gained into optimizing future maintenance of the scheme.

Background

BSI has been active in Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) as the English-language publisher for more than half a century, and - like its fellow publishers in other languages - has issued parts of it and versions of it in various degrees of detail, but limitations of resources have usually meant that effort has been concentrated on one product at any one time. Before a radical re-examination of policy in 1992, the 'full edition' was approaching 220 000 classes; there have also been 'medium editions' at the 40 000 level, 'abridged editions' at the 10 - 15 000 level, and specialized selections from the whole scheme called 'special subject editions'. When the first English medium edition began to appear in 1985[1], it became clear that versions of roughly this size were what the majority of users needed, and they rapidly established themselves as best-sellers, and as the standard form of UDC. It has now been decided that future editions of it in English will actually be called 'Standard Edition'. When BSI and several other organizations founded the international UDC Consortium (UDCC) in 1992, their first act was to establish a database of about 60 000 classes (it has now grown to about 61 000), called the Master Reference File (MRF), which is now the authoritative source of UDC; the second English medium edition[2] was downloaded from the MRF, and is therefore larger than its predecessor. It was obvious by 1992 that the full edition, published in English in 100 sections, could not be sustained; instead, it was decided that a few classes should be offered in extended versions where there is a perceived demand, and when resources permit. As the English abridged edition has long been out of print, the fortunes of UDC in English in the 1990s have been closely linked with the medium editions.

In 1997, acting on evidence of a certain demand for UDC in a cheaper and more concise form, BSI decided to produce a highly abridged version of UDC in the range 3 - 5 000 entries, with an introduction addressing those unfamiliar with classification, to be issued in paperback format and called the 'Pocket Edition'[3]. At the same time, it was hoped to market it to first-time users, while exploring non-traditional uses for the classification, and capitalizing on UDC's computer-friendliness. In connection with this last aspect, it was encouraging to see the appearance of UDC as a navigating device in resource directories on the World Wide Web. A list of relevant sites was eventually included in the introduction, partly as an example of what can be done and a model for newcomers to UDC use, but also because it makes a good impression.

UDC is an analytico-synthetic scheme consisting of main classes, hierarchically divided; tables of auxiliary numbers for language, documentary form, place, race, time, materials and persons; and a set of

connecting symbols for forming various kinds of compound notation. It has at times made heavy use of enumeration, including enumeration of compound subjects, and some cases of this survive even where later amendments to the scheme have provided the means of representing them by synthesis (personal characteristics such as age, gender and occupation are examples). Such cases, which now look anomalous, are gradually being removed, and the classification is being slowly transformed into a fully faceted scheme. But that will be a lengthy business, and the process of abridgement was obviously an opportunity to remove anomalies and duplications, exploit the synthetic capabilities of UDC more effectively, and achieve not only concision but greater logic and consistency.

Development of the Pocket Edition

The starting point for the edition was a selection extracted by program from the MRF, and based on number length. All entries of 3 digits or less in the auxiliary tables, and all entries of 4 digits or less in the main tables were retrieved, yielding 972 auxiliary numbers and 2989 main numbers - a total of nearly 4000 entries, or about a fifteenth of the 60 000 entries in the MRF. Obviously, being an automatic selection, it needed a great deal of detailed human editing, partly deleting (to remove unhelpful headings, and to reduce the size), partly adding (so as to include indispensable classes which happen to be lower in the hierarchy), and partly rewording (to provide more helpful class descriptions, and to add subsumed terms from lower-level classes). When a first draft of the edited selection was completed, it was circulated for review to the national UDC committee, and attracted a great deal of comment. In the light of this, it was further extensively re-edited, and an attempt made to satisfy the many, sometimes conflicting, requirements that were expected to be made of it. Inevitably, the result was a compromise, but we arrived at something publishable. Some of the criteria used are discussed below.

Size and scope

One difficulty right from the outset was a lack of any information about what size of collection the edition was likely to be used in. The target audience for UDC has always been harder to quantify than is the case with some of the rival classification schemes. This is because it has tended to be used in specialized information collections, particularly in science and technology, and - at least in the English-language editions - not so much in collections with a more general coverage. The content of UDC reflects this fact. It means that gearing the degree of detail in the coverage to the size of the services using it is tricky, verging on impossible. With a scheme such as Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), which is established in public library systems in many English-speaking countries, it is likely that many of the collections using it will have a coverage more or less spread over the whole spectrum of the scheme, and a proportional reduction of the complete classification will have a good chance of meeting the needs of the smaller users. With UDC, this is not so. The UDCC maintains cordial relations with the publishers of DDC, with observers on each other's committees, but it was hard to act on the freely given advice relating size to scope. Abridged Dewey was specifically aimed at libraries with up to 20 000 volumes, so there was always an objective means of determination (would a library of 20 000 volumes require this level of subdivision?)[4]. With UDC, the equivalent questions would have to be: would a collection of 20 000 items concentrating on electronics need this much subdivision? Would a similarly sized information service for the building industry require this much subdivision? The answer, unfortunately, would be yes both times, but in different places. And in the case of the Pocket Edition, we also had to ask: can we cater for beginners (students, trainee staff) and interest newcomers (collectors, computer buffs, 'net-heads') with this much subdivision? What was needed was enough to be serviceable but not so much as to be intimidating. In so saying, one is admitting that there was a large subjective element, for which this writer must accept responsibility. But the existence of a file of inquiries collected over many years, seeking advice on the interpretation of the tables and on classing difficult subjects, meant that the editing was not just guesswork, and it was possible to scan the subdivisions in the MRF with some experience of what terms, and what kinds of terms, were likely to be sought. It is likely that such experience will continue to accumulate: feedback about the usability, degree of inclusiveness and balance of classes in the first Pocket Edition will no doubt influence the content of future editions. One last consideration relating to size was a purely material one: the edition had to be physically containable in a pocket-sized format.

Excluded categories

It was decided early on to omit certain features that were considered superfluous in a text for use in teaching and for small-scale use. So there is no mention of the double colon for irreversible compounds and square brackets for algebraic subgrouping; and the whole of Auxiliary Table 1i ('Common auxiliaries of point of view') was omitted, as this table, with its incomprehensible title and ill-defined scope which have

already been discussed in print[5,6], is in process of cancellation anyway. There was another class of entries that invited immediate decisions: cases where the arbitrary limit on number length resulted in near-meaningless class descriptions. Some classes exist only in order to be subdivided, and when the subdivisions are eliminated, the parent class has no function. The abridgement process showed up many classes that are meaningless without their subdivisions:

006.4	Standards according to their status and scope
091.3	Various kinds of manuscript
325.5	Kinds of colony and colonization
338.4	Production and services according to economic sectors
578.8	Classification and systematics of viruses
62-50	Different types of control and regulation

Phrases such as 'kinds' or 'types of...' and 'according to...', introducing the characteristic of division that is about to be applied, often signal this situation. Here is a fuller example:

165.6	Epistemological viewpoints and doctrines according to origin, sources, forms of knowledge
165.61	Irrationalism
165.611	Intuitionism
165.612	Philosophy of faith. Traditionalism
165.613	Mysticism
165.614	Philosophy of feeling
165.62	Phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger)
165.63	Rationalism. Intellectualism
165.64	Empiricism
165.641	Sensualism
165.642	Psychologism
165.65	Criticism. Incl.: Neocriticism.

The four-digit limit reduces this array to 165.6 alone, but that class is really just an umbrella for its subdivisions. If they had included terms that were likely to be sought, one would have needed either to add some of the subdivisions to the selection, or else to subsume the specific terms to the higher (four-digit) level. In fact, concepts such as Mysticism, Empiricism and Sensualism have never been the subject of inquiries directed to BSI, and are unlikely to be one of the most used areas in the MRF; in this, as in many other cases, it seemed safe to omit the whole array. (Religious mysticism is in a different class.) Many 'according to' classes were eliminated in this way, though not all, because not all were devoid of useful subclasses, and four were in a different category, retained on grounds of literary warrant (they all began with the words 'Gospel according to...').

In other cases, the abridged notation yielded meaningful concepts, but had a structure designed to allow particular kinds of enumeration, and when that was deleted, the structure became inappropriate. For example, the common auxiliaries of place included:

(234)	Mountains of Europe
(235)	Mountains of Asia
(236)	Mountains of Africa
(237)	Mountains of North America
(238)	Mountains of South America
(239)	Mountains of Oceania, the Arctic, the Antarctic

This is exactly parallel with the place auxiliaries for the continents themselves, and the last digit in each of the above cases is simply copied from those numbers:

(4)	Europe
(5)	Asia
(6)	Africa
(7)	North and Central America
(8)	South America
(9)	States and regions of the South Pacific and Australia. Arctic. Antarctic

In the MRF, the parallel array, beginning with (23...), is not redundant, because each three-digit class is divided into specific features, e.g.

(234.3)	Alps

and then further subdivided in great detail, down to eight digits; but when these lower-level entries are eliminated, the enumerative structure of (234/239) becomes superfluous, and actually offends against the synthetic principle of UDC. The user can, and should, synthesize a class mark from (23) 'Mountains' and (4) 'Europe', using the colon as a relator:

(23:4)	Mountains of Europe.

The citation order can be varied if required, giving (4:23), but in either order the 'continent' facet is more clearly identifiable if synthesis is used. The enumerated classes were therefore replaced by two examples of synthesis as a sample of what can be done.

Some high-level classes express generalized concepts that are perfectly valid intellectually, and indeed justified by literary warrant, but which could be eliminated for the sake of concision, the concept being assigned to one level higher. 'General...' and 'theory...' were among the signposts to these entries:

536	Heat. Thermodynamics
536.1	General theory of heat
...	

537 Electricity. Magnetism. Electromagnetism
537.1 Theory of electricity

In each of these examples, the four-digit entries - even though they fall within the preliminary limit on number length - could be omitted with no danger of obscurity, and the concepts classed at the three-digit numbers with no further instruction. One can reasonably rely on ordinary human common sense to know that the theory of heat belongs with heat, and the theory of electricity with electricity.

Specific and other sought terms

In other cases, high-level entries, though vague or obscure in themselves, were the containing classes for specific concepts that were likely to be sought. To list them fully would be beyond the scope of a pocket edition, but some representation of them was needed so as not to lose terms such as 'opinion polling', 'market research' or the common names of many plant and animal species; so some terms were subsumed to a higher level in an 'including' note. A field dedicated to this purpose already existed in the MRF, but the use of it has been extended in the Pocket Edition. This seemed necessary so often that a symbol ◊ was used, to avoid innumerable repetitions of the word 'including'. Examples are:

303.4 Kinds of investigation. Research strategies. Investigation design. ◊ Survey. Opinion polling. Market research
595 Articulata. ◊ Worms. Leeches. Arthropods. Crustaceans (shrimps, lobsters, crabs). Arachnids (mites, ticks, spiders, scorpions)
677.2 Vegetable hairs. ◊ Cotton. Kapok

The tables for systematic botany and zoology (UDC 58 and 59) were particularly difficult to abridge, partly because the notation is not purely hierarchic, making use of ranges of numbers linked by the slash (/) and occasionally using coordinate numbers for subordinate concepts, but most of all because most of the specific and recognizable terms, likely to be sought by non-specialists, are at low levels in the hierarchy, far beyond the scope originally planned for this edition. In an early draft, this section was drastically abridged to the classes Amphibia, Reptilia, Aves, Mammalia etc, with the intention that users should denote more restrictive groupings such as genera and species by alphabetic extension, (using Latin binomials, e.g. 599 *Panthera leo* 'Lion'). This recourse was scathingly criticised by the referees, and indeed would have led to large classes of entities being arranged alphabetically, defeating part of the purpose of classification; it would also have meant that non-academic enthusiasts, who are part of the target group, would have had to consult other works to find the Latin name before they could arrive at the correct class mark. This editor had made a false start, and so strong were the objections that it was completely re-thought, and a more generous selection devised, extending to seven or eight digits and taking more account of literary warrant:

599.742.4 Mustelids. ◊ Stoats. Weasels. Minks. Polecats. Ferrets. Martens. Sable. Wolverine (Glutton). Badgers. Skunks. Otters
... 599.742.71 Large felines ('Big cats'). ◊ Lion. Tiger. Leopard (panther). Jaguar

Two important points are apparent from these examples: firstly, even with the more generous notational selection, large numbers of terms in the 'including' field were needed if species were to be traceable by their common names; secondly, non-scientific groupings may be the subject of much literature, and 'Big cats' is a classic case.

A particular form of non-scientific grouping in botany seemed so all-pervading that an emergency repair to UDC was needed; it was known all along that the exercise of abridgement would lead to proposed improvements to the scheme, but this case was urgent: the pocket edition could hardly be realized without it. Research in public libraries and in bookshops revealed scores of titles of field guides, all based primarily on a non-taxonomic arrangement, along the lines of:

- Trees of the British Isles
- European wild flowers
- A field guide to trees and shrubs
- A handbook to flowering plants.

A desperate attempt to fit such material (with a little fudging) into the taxonomic arrangement of the existing UDC was completely futile. The popular classification of plants according to size and form has absolutely no relation whatever to the scientific taxonomy. There is no species, genus, tribe, family or order that contains all of the group 'trees', and it is a fact perplexing to a layman that the oak tree is more closely related to the stinging nettle than to (for instance) the poplar, and neither are closely related to conifers. An alternative classification acknowledging the arrangement by form and size used in the ubiquitous field guides was clearly needed, and it was possible to include it in the annual updating journal *Extensions and Corrections*[7] before the text of the Pocket Edition was finalized; so a selection was included in the latter:

582.09	Classification according to size and form
582.091	Trees (large woody plants with trunk)
◊ 582.091(41)	Trees of the British isles
◊ 582.62.091	Trees of the Hamamelidae
582.093	Shrubs (smaller woody plants without single trunk)
582.099	Herbaceous or non-woody plants (often called 'plants' or 'flowers').

The symbol ◊ was used to introduce examples of synthesis, and serves as a hint to the user that this device is available ad libitum. Use of UDC's characteristic special auxiliary notation makes it possible either to use the optional classification separately or to integrate it with the scientific taxonomy, as illustrated by the second example.

Range numbers, parallelism and other problems

Problems were also created by the use of the slash in entries that are part of the tables (as opposed to being a device available at the user's discretion) - in particular in the classes 'Music' and 'Musical instruments' - the two classes are parallel. For example, the following is an extract from the MRF:

681.818.1/.4	Brass instruments. Metal wind instruments
681.818.1	Trumpets
681.818.2	Trombones
681.818.3	Cornets. Cornets-a-pistons
681.818.4	Other brass instruments
681.818.41	Natural horns. Hunting horns. Post horns. Jagdhörner (Cors de chasse. Corni di caccia). Valve horns (French horns)
681.818.42	Saxhorns
681.818.43	Saxophones
681.818.46	Key bugles
681.818.47	Valve bugles. Flugelhorns
681.818.48	Tubas. Euphoniums. Sousaphones. Serpents etc.
681.818.5/.8	Woodwind instruments
681.818.5	Flutes
681.818.51	Transverse flutes. Incl.: Piccolos. Fifes
681.818.52	Vertical flutes. Incl.: Recorders. Flageolets. Pan-pipes. Ocarinas
681.818.56	Whistles
681.818.6	Clarinets
681.818.7	Oboes. Cors anglais. Shawms. Krummhorns (crumhorns) etc.
681.818.8	Bassoons
681.818.9	Other wind instruments
681.818.91	Alpenhorns. Bagpipes
681.818.93	Mouth organs (harmonicas)

A glance at this list immediately shows that it divides into two subsets, and for the purpose of abridgement one needs to isolate them:

1 brass, metal
2 woodwind;

but, given the current notation, that would mean:

681.818.1/.4	Brass, metal wind instruments
681.818.5/.8	Woodwind instruments.

This form of abridgement would immediately raise the question: what is the meaning of the individual numbers in those ranges .1/.4 and .5/.8? Which instruments are classed where? The lack of any answer in the Pocket Edition would be extremely frustrating for the user; yet, to enumerate the individual instruments would be excessively generous in an edition of this size. In the event, the selection was reluctantly limited to a single entry, with at least some of the sought terms in the 'including' field:

681.818	Wind instruments (aerophones). ◊ Brass instruments, e.g. trumpet, trombone. Woodwind instruments, e.g. flute, oboe, clarinet.

The parallel problem occurs in class 78 Music, where the MRF includes:

786/789	Music for individual instruments *divided as 681.816/.819... .*

Since much of the enumeration has been eliminated from 681.81... (and throughout, as is inevitable in an abridgement), the instruction for parallel division is not much help, but the cryptic number 786/789 would be just as frustrating as the range numbers under 681.818 would have been. The expedient adopted here was a slight falsification of the MRF so as to provide a non-ranging number, with details indicated (in character with UDC) by colon combination:

786	Music for individual instruments
◊ 786:681.816	For keyboard instruments
◊ 786:681.817	For stringed instruments
◊ 786:681.817.1	For violin.

Examples have been given above of long notations from the botany and zoology sections, included to accommodate the better-known genera and species with their common names. In the event, it often seemed right to go beyond the four-digit limit for other reasons too. Special auxiliary notation often lengthens the class number:

546.027	Isotopes

and sometimes a quirk in the distribution of notation among subjects across the scheme means that even the highest level of a class has a relatively long number:

159.9 Psychology
621.039 Applied nuclear science.

In the case of 621.039, if the four-digit limit were observed, nuclear technology would be eliminated altogether, which would obviously be absurd; it was included, along with a selection of subdivisions for fission reactors, fusion reactors and radioactive waste. In the case of psychology, the four-digit limit would mean there would be no subdivisions, and concepts such as emotions, memory, insanity and (more prosaically) aptitude testing would be lost. Subsuming the terms to a single heading was not the answer in a class of this size, and it would lead to the juxtaposition of such disparate concepts that the effect would be rather comical ('...including insanity and aptitude testing'). Obviously, at least a few subdivisions were needed. Both 'Psychology' and 'Applied nuclear science' were parked at their present numbers many years ago, awaiting redevelopment and relocation; that has not yet materialized, so the current state of affairs must be dealt with pragmatically.

Anomalies and exceptions to the rules

Among the anomalies eliminated in the process of abridgement were many cases of exceptions to the rules for applying special auxiliary subdivisions. Normally, a special auxiliary is applicable at the number where it is listed and at any direct subdivision of that number. But over the years many exceptions have been introduced, either deliberately as a last resort, or perhaps out of carelessness, or as temporary expedients which were then forgotten. An extension of the range of applicability is not generally problematic, and the use of the hyphen auxiliaries -1/-9 listed under 62 but applicable throughout 62 to 69, is unobjectionable in principle; the same auxiliaries, or parts of them, have also been transplanted to class 0 (under 004.3 in the MRF, though not in the Pocket Edition), 528, 53.084, 542.9, 77 and 903. Restriction of applicability is much more annoying, and it occurs when a conflicting series of auxiliaries with the same notation has been introduced at a subclass of the class where the original series is listed. That is why the MRF includes a get-out clause at 62-1/-9:

'*These special auxiliaries are applicable throughout 62/69 except where otherwise indicated.*'

(my emphasis); and it is otherwise indicated at the very first subdivision:

62-1 General characteristics of machines etc.
The 62-1... auxiliaries are not applicable at 633/635, 66, 678, 687 and their subdivisions. Only 62-11... and 62-18... are applicable at 624 and its subdivisions.

Turning to the classes mentioned in the note immediately reveals the reason for the restriction: conflicting series of auxiliaries, such as

624-1 *divided as 624.1 except for -11 and -18*
624-15 Foundations.

Because the Pocket Edition is a drastic abridgement, all the anomalies in the hyphen series could be, and were, eliminated; so also was the cautionary note at 62-1/-9, which was no longer needed. Clearly, many of the subdivisions of 62-1/-9 are pseudo-common auxiliaries, and accordingly they are being studied with a view to transferring many concepts to a new table of common attributes (part of common auxiliary table 1k). In the meantime, the simplifications adopted should be a help to the less experienced user. Many anomalies in other auxiliary series have also been excised, though a few (very few) such oddities still remain, where they seemed unavoidable, indicated by exception notes at 52-1/-8, 528, 7 (referring to 7.01/.09) and 77.0.... As a reminder that the range of applicability of some auxiliaries is greater than might be assumed, running footnotes were added in 62 to 69 and throughout class 7.

Insights into general UDC problems

UDC has a habit, often described as a bad one, of summarizing subclasses by grouping selected terms at high-level numbers - terms which are then repeated at more precise numbers lower in the hierarchy. This can be confusing, especially to beginners who may not be familiar with the concept of hierarchic notation, and may get the impression that there are a lot of numbers for the same thing. Advice such as 'Always class at the most specific number available in a given array' is a valid general principle in classification, but unfortunately no such instruction appears in UDC, and even if it did it might not be readily understood. (If it were to be introduced, it would have to appear in literally hundreds of places.) Indexers are inclined to comment on this problem. Where possible, the feature has been minimized or discarded, but it is often not possible. Class 9 contains examples of both sorts: the term 'Theoretical geography' was deleted from 911 on the grounds that it appears lower down at 911.5/.9, but 9 itself is among a number of entire classes that are defined simply as the sum of their subclasses:

	0	Generalities. Science and knowledge. Organization. Information. Documentation. Librarianship. Institutions. Publications
...	3	Social sciences. Statistics. Politics. Economics. Trade. Law. Government. Military affairs. Welfare. Insurance. Education. Folklore
...	9	Geography. Biography. History

Some of these could well be redefined in future, though it would be hard to think of a generic term for the contents of class 9.

The editing of the Pocket Edition was a valuable exercise for UDC as a whole, drawing attention to areas in need of revision and providing reminders to editors to do something about them. Any editing process that compels a review of the whole scheme is likely to have this effect, and indeed it happened during the compilation of early Medium Editions - particularly the first one in English[1], which later formed the basis of the MRF. Soberingly, some of the bad patches identified more than ten years previously were still in need of attention (resources cannot always cover all the work that is desirable), but progress is slowly being made, and the latest reminders will contribute to the revision process. Problems to be addressed include

- deceptive notation (at 621.039, .0 is untypically used for main divisions, not special auxiliaries);
- imperfect facet analysis (in 614.8, risks and hazards should be separated from their prevention, and in 62-5..., processes and entities are mixed - one case out of many);
- unhelpful locations (printing at 655 interrupts a sequence of mainly managerial concepts in 65, and marine salvage and rescue facilities do not have much connection with navigational facilities and channel maintenance at 627.7);
- obsolete materials-based classification of industries, with 68 divided like 67 (furniture at 684, cf. 674, because it was traditionally made of wood; luggage at 685, cf. 675, because it was traditionally made of leather);
- unhelpful filing order (the place auxiliaries for the ancient world, (3...), do not achieve a chronological order for ancient civilizations).

Some classes are simply out of date, such as nuclear technology, electrical engineering and photography. They are noted, and due for attention as soon as practicable.

Conclusions

Finally, what conclusions can be drawn from the exercise? Firstly, that the initial impulse to extract a representative selection from the whole spectrum of UDC was not a helpful way to proceed. An abridgement is a perfect opportunity to eliminate duplications and discard areas that are known to be unsatisfactory, and to compensate by applying the devices and rules for synthesis that UDC already provides. Secondly, some classes are due for overhaul, as mentioned above, but major revisions are in the pipeline, e.g. for chemistry and medicine, and a final draft exists for religion, eliminating the offensive imbalance (21 to 28 'Christianity', 29 'Others...'). Thirdly, that an abridgement, if looked at pedantically, can never be quite the same classification as the parent scheme. Where the fuller text gives several options but the abridgement is limited to one, the different users might end up classing the same concept in quite different classes. Ionization, for example, appears in the MRF in Astronomy, Physics and Chemistry (many subdivisions), but in the Pocket Edition it is only under Physics at 537.5; similarly, osmosis appears in the MRF in Physics, Chemistry and Zoology, but in the Pocket edition is limited to Physics at 532.7. Not only can this not be avoided, but maybe it should be welcomed, as it should make retrieval more efficient, and suggests that a little more rigour should be introduced into the MRF in future revision and maintenance. Lastly, whatever shortcomings in UDC one is made aware of, and although to some extent one distorts the scheme to produce an abridgement at all, the basis of a sophisticated and very flexible indexing and retrieval language is still there, and its character and distinctive features still inform this abridged and simplified version. If it serves the purpose intended, it should not only be usable in its own right, but should increase awareness of UDC's effectiveness for organizing information, in all media and formats in which it occurs.

Acknowledgements

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