Editorial

Diversity in Knowledge Organization

by Hope A. Olson

This issue of *Knowledge Organization* coincidentally contains three articles that address the use of classification in specific situations. Lucy ADCOCK writes about the MIRA-CLE project to provide access to music from across Europe for people who are visually impaired. Producing specialized formats such as Braille is very costly. This circumstance suggests that even though developing a degree of uniformity sufficient for a union catalogue is time-consuming and, therefore, expensive, the effort still pays off. ADCOCK describes the process of selecting a classification and developing a procedure for its application across institutions. It is an inventive use of a standardized general classification, the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), to help meet the specific needs of a group of users. Our second article by OH Dong-Geun and YEO Ji-Suk concerns classification of religion in the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) in a country that does not have a single dominant religion – in this instance, Korea. It explores the limitations of options provided in DDC and proposes a specific technique for addressing them in Korea as well as a more general method that could be applied elsewhere. The third article by Anestis SITAS concerns the classification of Byzantine literature in the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) and the problems of organizing it either as Greek literature or as Christian literature.

These three articles raise different issues as they examine the roles of standard classification schemes with regard to specialized materials. SITAS raises an issue that follows in a long tradition of concern that standard classification schemes treat topics in a uniform manner that is unsuited to particular areas. Byzantine literature, with its links to Greek literature and to Christian literature is an excellent example. It has unique characteristics that do not apply to most other literatures. It is linked to a particular chronological period as well as to a specific place. Since literature is usually classified according to language, it is not surprising that the classification of Byzantine literature is confusing. SITAS elucidates the issues and expands on the treatment of Byzantine literature in LCC. It is not only of use to those who deal directly with Byzantine literature, but also a contribution toward understanding the problems of diffusion encountered with some subject areas. OH and YEO address a somewhat similar concern in developing an approach to more flexibility in DDC religion classification. Here the problem is still that a particular model, in this instance the foregrounding of a single religion over others, does not suit all circumstances. However, the problem is not diffusion of topics as encountered with Byzantine literature, but a too focussed approach. ADCOCK's work is very different in its concern that classification across institutions does not have sufficient standardization for sharing across boundaries. Classifications that have been tailored to countries and institutions needs to be brought together to allow construction of an effective union catalogue. The result does not require that individual institutions standardize their practices, but facilitates their linkage.

What all three of these situations have in common is a desire to fulfill specific needs without reinventing the wheel and without losing touch with what amount to *de facto* global standards. The coincidence that brings these three articles together as they work with the three most internationally-used classification schemes in the world (UDC, DDC, and LCC) suggests that the issues they raise are of common and current concern. It suggests that many and varied voices need to be heard in discussions of classification and that study of the traditional, established schemes is of continuing importance. These three articles all imply the underlying economic ramifications and altruistic intentions that arise from a desire to share maintenance of classification schemes, creation of biblio-

graphic records and ownership of information resources. If these economic factors did not apply then specialized needs might be met with individually developed schemes for each unique purpose. If these factors contained no altruistic intent then there would be no need to make resources available between institutions. The balance between universal and particular is clearly present in this very diverse trio of contributions.

The literature of knowledge organization has contained work on meeting the needs of particular situations for some time. A perusal of Gerhard RIESTHUIS's and Winfried SCHMITZ-ESSER's "Bibliography of 10 Years International Society for Knowledge Organization" in *Knowledge Organization* volume 26, no 4 (1999) finds papers on classification applicable in subject areas from anesthaesiology to cinematography to psychology to zoology, for treatment of topics from African spiritual churches to iconography, as appropriate to cultures from India to Russia, and to accommodate contemporary issues from ecology to feminism. Moving from classification to other forms of knowledge organization brings in yet other particular concerns including art works, HIV/AIDS, Italian literature, law, sociophysics, and spiritual and religious domains. Since the bibliography *Knowledge Organization* has published articles on classification of logotherapy, subject access to fiction, organization of research in pharmacy and a conceptual framework for complementary and alternative medicine. The Sixth Biennial International Society for Knowledge Organization (ISKO) conference held in Toronto in July 2000 addressed knowledge organization in engineering and liquid crystal optics, of patents and official documents, in Chinese, about homosexuality, and on eBay — among others. Considerable work has been and continues to be done on multilingual thesauri and the potential of classifications for use as switching languages. Related to this work are the linguistic and systems knowledge needed to make use of our access standards.

This list of literature is a taste rather than a comprehensive survey. It serves to remind us of the diverse knowledge domains in need of specialized access and to the commitment of our field to addressing those needs. These knowledge domains are of many types: academic disciplines, points of view, currently important topics, national and cultural specificities, and others limited only by our abilities to recognize particular communities in need of information. During the time that I have been writing this editorial I had the opportunity to exchange ideas with a computer scientist from New Zealand named Ian WITTEN. He has led a team developing software called Greenstone for the creation of digital libraries (http://nzdl.org). The digital libraries that his group constructs are mainly of publications in the public domain intended for use in developing countries. Their topics range from agriculture to prevention of violence against women. The discussion reminded me of how our concerns about connecting people and knowledge are shared by multitude of communities of researchers and professionals who offer different kinds of expertise. All of these efforts are probably never going to fulfill every need, but it is both exciting and satisfying to be a part of the effort and to see how diverse our successes can be.

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