Developments in Subject Cataloging

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It will be desirable at the outset to define the limits of this discussion. Subject cataloging, in the present article, is intended to embrace only that cataloging activity which provides a verbal subject approach to materials added to library collections. It does not include classification, for that aspect of the cataloging process is discussed elsewhere. This restriction contracts with the common use of the term to denote the organizational unit which, in many libraries, both classifies books and establishes subject headings for them. The justification for the limitation is in part practical, since there is need for a term less awkward than "the assignment of subject headings." It is logical in that "subject cataloging," as here used, refers to the determination and assignment of suitable entries for use in the subject component of a library's catalog.

Seymour Taine has observed that there are three themes running through the literature relating to subject headings. They are (1) the assertion that subject headings should be designed to meet the specific requirements of a given bibliographical function, (2) the principle that subject headings should be as specific as possible, and (3) the argument that subject catalogs, subject heading lists, and subject indexes should not attempt to be all things to all men. The rest of the literature, he says, is largely devoted to discussions of detail—whether headings should be singular or plural in form, directly specific or indirectly so, and how subject headings have been misused. That the first theme which Taine mentions pertains to a definition of the function of subject headings is particularly significant. Many writings begin or end on the note that the development of theoretical principles to govern subject cataloging techniques is our most compelling need.

On the surface, the plea for a theory of subject headings appears not so much a request for principles, as an expression of hope that someone will work out a manual to guide subject catalogers in the techniques of their art. The kinds of questions raised—how specific

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shall subject headings be? when is it proper to invert a heading? shall entry be made under topic subdivided by place or under place subdivided by topic? is the proper form an inverted heading or a subdivided one? how and when may chronological arrangements be introduced into the subject file? is it proper to file explanatory notes in the public catalog? where shall *see also* references be filed, at the beginning or end of a subject group or somewhere in between?—are not all questions of principle; some have to do with method. It is perhaps the failure to distinguish clearly between theory and technique that has contributed to seventy-five years of discussion on how particular problems in subject cataloging should be handled.

If we examine the principles of descriptive cataloging, we find that they are concerned first with objectives: (1) to distinguish an item from all other items and to describe its scope, content, and bibliographic relation to others, and (2) to present these data in a form which permits integration with the descriptions of other items and which will respond best to the interests of most users of catalogs. Second, they state certain generalizations about how the objectives are to be achieved: (1) that a physically complete copy shall be described, (2) that the description shall be no more extensive than necessary, (3) that the terms used in the item itself shall form the basis of the description, (4) that the data shall be organized in a manner most useful to patrons and best suited to integration with other catalog entries, (5) that documentation shall be given only in unusual cases, and (6) that a uniform style shall be adopted for all entries.

The principles of subject cataloging ought to be similar in structure, though, of course, not in detail. They should be concerned with such questions as (1) what is the purpose of subject cataloging? (2) what form is the subject catalog to take? (3) to what depth shall subject analysis ordinarily be attempted? (4) what shall be the form of entry for the subject catalog? and (5) what ought the language and terminology of the subject catalog to be?

As we assess the current situation in subject cataloging, it is apparent that some of these principles have already been established by common practice, if not by common agreement. For instance, the alphabetic subject catalog, either alone or as an integral component of the dictionary catalog, has come to be the most general form in this country if not abroad. Library of Congress subject heading forms are virtually standard. And, in general, there is wide agreement in this country, even among specialists, that the English language and com-
mon and popular terminology shall be used for the subject headings in our catalogs. These principles are well stated and discussed by David J. Haykin. 4

It should be apparent, however, that each of these principles which has come to be widely accepted is dependent upon the purpose of the subject catalog. Yet this is a point upon which we have not yet reached wide concurrence. We are in the somewhat curious position then of having agreed to generalizations about something whose aim is not yet clearly determined. It is this failure to define the objective with sufficient precision which has contributed to the long, still unsettled controversy over the most suitable form for the subject catalog to take. It is this same failure which has led in our time to some confusion between the functions of subject cataloging and subject indexing, and to criticisms of the subject catalog because it does not provide the sufficiently deep analysis of the contents of our libraries required or sought by some users of library materials.

Haykin has stated that “the primary purpose of the subject catalog is to show which books on a specific subject the library possesses.” 5 This presumes that subject entries will be made for specific concepts, and that the reference structure of the catalog will be designed to facilitate the isolation of specific subject, and for no other end. In contrast, Charles A. Cutter speaks of cross references (his “syndetic connectives”) as correspondents to and substitutions for the arrangement in a systematic catalog. 6 Since it is an accepted function of the systematic catalog through its arrangement and its index to reveal all of the relevant material on a subject which is recorded within it, it is apparent that we have here two diametrically opposed objectives. The first aim is to facilitate the identification of a particular reference or a few selected references; the second is to present a bibliography of all there is to be found on a particular subject within a specific collection. Obviously the techniques required to achieve selectivity on the one hand and comprehensive coverage on the other will be different.

Julia Pettee, 7 S. C. Bradford, 8 and B. C. Vickery, 9 as well as others, have asserted the dependence of the alphabetic subject catalog upon classification. According to their point of view a logical structure of cross references within the subject catalog is essential to its effectiveness, so that at whatever point a user enters it, he will be led to all of the entries relevant to his goal. It is not surprising that most of the group referred to, including Bradford, 8 Vickery, 9 H. E. Bliss, 10 and S. R. Ranganathan, 11 to mention but a few, prefer the classified catalog
as an economical approach, since references are not scattered so widely within the framework of a classification scheme as they are in an artificial alphabetic arrangement. They insist upon the need for logical integrity in the subject catalog, since they conceive that its function is to identify all of the references within the system which are related to the topic under investigation.

Opponents minimize this need and adopt a more pragmatic approach. Their attitude is perhaps best expressed by Jerrold Orne,12 who denies the need to coordinate every related subject heading with cross references, and asserts that subject cataloging problems stem, in large measure, from failure to distinguish between indexing, as he calls it, and classifying. If the function of the subject catalog is to facilitate the identification of selected items on some specific subject, its reference structure should be no more complex than necessary for the purpose. This is not a new point of view by any means, for W. W. Bishop13 raised questions about the need for see also references as long ago as 1906.

Implicit in both arguments is concern for the user of catalogs, for both parties seek to provide a subject approach to library materials which will have the greatest utility. The habits of catalog users ought, then, to furnish definitive evidence to eliminate the disagreement. Unfortunately, our catalogs have long been constructed upon untested assumptions as to how they are employed. It is only within recent years that attempts have been made to describe the habits of catalog users, and what evidence is available seems too limited to settle the dispute with any finality. Such evidence as is available tends to support the pragmatists, indicating that most people utilize a subject catalog either as a guide to shelf location or as an aid to the selection of a few good references.14 There is no evidence to suggest that there is any significant use of the subject catalog to locate all of the material on a particular subject which the library may own.

As a matter of fact, there are serious limitations upon the ability of the subject catalog to do this. Obvious omissions include discussions in non-monographic publications which are not analyzed in the catalog, and shorter treatments which may be incidental to a monographic discussion of another topic. But there are others as well. Jennette Hitchcock15 has enumerated over ninety groups of material, of four general types, for which subject entries are not ordinarily found in typical subject catalogs.

Until there is more evidence to show why subject catalogs are con-
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sulted there can be no final answer to the question of function. Until catalog function is defined with some precision, it is not possible to propose final answers to questions either of theory or of method, and answers which are suggested must be considered tentative and subject to change. There are hopeful signs, however. Modern discussions of the subject catalog show increasing awareness of the inability of the subject catalog to exhibit a logical and wholly consistent structure, and at the same time be receptive promptly to such new terms and new references as may be required to direct users to the materials they want. (At least these features cannot be achieved if subject cataloging is to be kept up to date and if its costs are to be held within reasonable limits.) As Alex Ladenson points out, we must decide whether the catalog is to be an alphabetical quick-reference-finding tool, a scholarly and exhaustive bibliography, or a logical and systematic arrangement of the fields of knowledge.

Insofar as a trend can be discerned, it appears that the pragmatic approach is in the ascendant. There are suggestions, more in the air than on paper, that subject catalogs are destined to be freed from their logical framework and developed along more utilitarian lines in the future. And the substance of the discussions at the institute on subject analysis held at Columbia University in the summer of 1952 suggests that there is wide recognition of the urgent need to define objectives and principles in the immediate future.

Orne’s insistence that subject cataloging is really indexing has already been noted. While this may be a valid generalization, it may also be a deterrent to the determination of true catalog function. For just as the subject catalog is relatively inefficient in comparison with subject bibliography in assembling all of the materials which deal with a particular subject, neither does it compete with the subject index in isolating units of information which relate to a topic, unless its scope is expanded far beyond what seems presently to be practicable. There is need to recognize different levels of subject control, and within the hierarchy the bibliography serves one purpose, the subject catalog another, and the subject index still a third. This distinction in purpose implies that we cannot substitute the bibliography for the catalog, however attractive that possibility may seem. A corollary is obvious—neither can we substitute the catalog for the bibliography, for to do so will obscure its real function and reduce its efficiency.

But the need to identify units of information is particularly acute in a society which has come to be dependent upon scientific and technical

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research. Science and technology require this, as is evident from the variety of indexing and abstracting services which have been developed to serve workers in these subject fields. S. V. Larkey has observed that Chemical Abstracts attempts to provide a subject entry for every important topic considered in each article it indexes. During and since World War II the need to isolate specific units of information has been felt more acutely than ever before, and the frustrating experiences of workers in scientific and technological disciplines has led to an insistence that subject controls be improved. In recent years there have been various attempts to develop techniques for subject analysis which will be competent to isolate minute topics, yet capable of easy manipulation in order to relocate units of information surely and economically when they are needed.

One phase of this development has been the proliferation of special lists of headings designed to reveal the subject content of the technical report literature which has been a by-product of the war and of continued governmental support to applied research projects. Another has been the attempts to exploit a variety of mechanical, electronic, and photographic machines and gadgets, in the hope that they might speed up the process of locating and identifying relevant units of information. This latter, in turn, has led to a renewed interest in systems of classification, for there was early recognition of the need for a competent code to organize information so that automatic subject searches might be made mechanically or electrically. Ralph R. Shaw has described and assessed the place of machine techniques in subject bibliography. It is now apparent that while mechanized methods of one kind or another have a legitimate place in subject analysis in its broadest sense, they do not appear to offer any direct assistance in solving the problems of the subject catalog. And there seems also to be a general awareness that the limitations of the subject catalog prevent its becoming an efficient device for identifying and locating units of information.

There is another aspect to this introduction of machine techniques in subject analysis which must be mentioned, lest such techniques become confused with the purposes of the subject catalog and postpone further the definition of its true function. J. W. Perry has observed that human understanding of phenomena and events is based upon analysis in terms of who and what participated, what happened under what conditions, and with what results. Thus any device intended to facilitate understanding—and we may accept the subject catalog as
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One—must attempt to show interrelationships among the concepts and ideas with which it operates. It will be evident that subject headings do this, for almost any one which consists of more than a single term shows some relation, as, for example, "Radioisotopes—Physiological Effect." The relationship here suggested is a more specific concept than "Radioisotopes" alone. Mortimer Taube has shown how the introduction of a second subdivision, thereby refining the expression of relation, may produce a still more specific concept; thus "Liver—Radiation Injuries—Gamma Rays" is more specific than the combination of two separate subject entries: "Liver—Radiation Injuries," and "Gamma Rays—Pathological Effects." Without laboring the argument, however, it will be realized that there are limits beyond which the subject catalog cannot express complex relations directly and intelligibly, since the high degree of subordination of terms required can result in an overwhelming variety of approaches, thus necessitating an unwieldy cross reference structure.

Machine techniques for sorting, Perry points out, have been developed to a point where searches can be made quickly and efficiently for highly complex relationships, and particularly for those which may not have been anticipated at the time the original index references were made. In the ordinary subject catalog such relations can only be sought, if at all, through laborious rearrangements of the entries in order to bring into juxtaposition the separate components.

In connection with the development of machine techniques it has been observed that there is need to weigh carefully the terminology and form of subject heading terms employed, since effectiveness depends upon the precision with which particular concepts can be described and identified. A machine is incapable of making semantic differentiations. Thus subject heading terms used in machine sorting must be precisely and exactly defined. While reasonably precise terminologies are characteristic of the sciences and of law, they are not typical of other fields. The nature of the problem in the social sciences has been suggested by C. A. Beard and Sidney Hook and by C. J. Friedrich and Mary C. Trackett. In any case subject cataloging techniques which use compound, phrase, and subdivided headings introduce semantic problems.

Taube has considered this matter of terminology in several papers, and has suggested that a "coordinate" system of indexing which uses single terms as subject entries makes it possible to identify necessary relationships at the same time that it eliminates the need for complex

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subject heading terms and an elaborate cross reference structure.\textsuperscript{25} Relations are identified by comparing the entry cards for as many specific concepts as may be involved, and by isolating the items which are common to all of the entries. Since individual entries are unit terms only, there is no theoretical limit to the complexity of relationships which can be sought through this system. A particular advantage cited by Taube is the ability of the unit system to absorb subject terms and headings from different authorities or standard lists, since a separate entry under each term of the heading eliminates the necessity of considering the particular form in which the heading may be expressed. This hospitality of the unit system recommends its usefulness in any cooperative indexing project. Taube's scheme is provocative, even though it has not yet been tested fully nor had its applications to subject cataloging practices defined clearly.

Since we have come no closer to realizing a precise statement of objectives for the subject catalog than the foregoing account indicates, it is evident that there can have been no revolutionary changes in subject cataloging methods. Thus the basic code for subject cataloging is still largely the same as that formulated by Cutter in 1876.\textsuperscript{26} A comparison of Cutter's rules with those contained in the Vatican Library's \textit{Norme}, now available in English translation,\textsuperscript{27} reveals only a multiplication of rules to cover specific cases, and no significant differences in method. Two other publications in recent years have served to crystallize the method. Miss Pettee's somewhat brief account of the development of the alphabetic subject catalog\textsuperscript{7} identifies origins and clarifies relationships among the varied forms of subject catalogs. And her exposition of the technique of analyzing specific headings and their interrelationships is the classic account of how integrity of the logical structure of the catalog is to be obtained. More recently, Haykin's manual on subject headings\textsuperscript{28} outlines the body of subject cataloging principles insofar as they have been developed, and describes in detail the particulars of L.C. practices in handling some of the more vexing problems, such as those of reference structure, subdivisions, geographic headings, and filing arrangements. A recent announcement looks to the early publication of a subject heading code\textsuperscript{29} which, presumably, will have the same purpose and usefulness in subject cataloging as W. S. Merrill's \textit{Code for Classifiers}\textsuperscript{30} has for classification.

There have, of course, been other changes. The major general lists of subject headings have been altered in detail and content, but not in any fundamental way. The L.C. list, now in its fifth edition,\textsuperscript{31} has
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grown to larger size through the addition of new headings, and it has taken over the general plan of arrangement used by Minnie E. Sears, so that all see also and refer from references are listed with the headings to which they are related. Thus the list has become easier to use as an aid in subject cataloging. Moreover, its monthly and cumulated lists of changes and revisions represent a highly-developed expert technique for acquainting using libraries promptly, and on a current basis, with modifications made by L.C. Haykin has announced that the sixth edition will be a thoroughly revised and pruned list calculated to eliminate a maximum number of obsolete terms and to correct inconsistencies which have crept in through the years.

The Sears list, originally designed for use in small libraries, has enlarged its scope so that it now comes nearer to meeting the requirements of medium-sized libraries. Though it lacks an effective method for being kept up to date, completely new editions have been published with relative frequency. Except for its use of less specific terminology and fewer subdivisions, the Sears list resembles the L.C. compilation in conception and in major detail, so that shifting from the use of one to the other is not a particularly burdensome change.

Neither list is wholly satisfactory, however—L.C. because it is too comprehensive, and Sears because it seems not to be comprehensive enough. Jennette Hitchcock and Edith Scott have both spoken to this point; and Miss Scott, in particular, has suggested the need to develop a new subject heading list less comprehensive than L.C., but still more detailed than Sears, for use in college libraries. In spite of the criticisms of these lists, both have come to be widely accepted as standard.

Both have grown in size. Since 1944, for example, nearly 14,000 new subject headings have been added to the L.C. compilation, while only 1,100 have been canceled and changed. Undoubtedly the alterations represent an attempt to keep the L.C. subject list as specific and up to date as possible. An earlier study by the present writer demonstrates that the changes in question also increase the specificity of L.C. subject headings. This finding is in keeping with Margaret Egan’s observation that one trend in subject analysis has been a shift in emphasis from abstract to concrete and highly specific terminology.

The question of particularity looms large in most discussions of subject cataloging, for while the principle of specific entry has been widely accepted, the auxiliary problem of how specific is specific is still not solved. Haykin has observed that the question is not one to
which an absolute answer can be given, since the need will vary from subject field to subject field and from library to library.\textsuperscript{28} Apparently in some circles, however, there is feeling that we have allowed headings to develop which are too distinctive for greatest utility.\textsuperscript{39}

Focusing interest upon the principle of specific entry has raised other questions about the form of subject headings represented in the general lists. Haykin\textsuperscript{28} has pointed out that if this principle is accepted, headings must be \textit{direct} as well as specific in order to keep practices consistent. Not only do direct-specific headings imply a minimum of inversion and subordination, but they also avoid the pitfalls of alphabetico-classed subject headings which found their way into the first edition of the L.C. subject heading list because, according to J. C. M. Hanson,\textsuperscript{40} L.C. catalogers assumed that such headings reflected the typical approach of readers. There is not universal agreement on the need for direct and specific entry, however. Marie L. Prevost\textsuperscript{41} has suggested that wide adoption of a form of heading putting the prominent noun first would produce subject headings which could be explained more easily, and which would require fewer and less complicated cross references. Though this approach would lead to a prevalence of alphabetico-classed headings, it is not clear whether the user would find them easier to handle. The evidence from studies of use points to widespread failure to comprehend the principle of specific entry, at the same time that it suggests preference on the part of users for it.\textsuperscript{14}

While further studies of the question are essential to understanding of the problem, it may be that no clear-cut pattern can be identified, and that the makers of future lists can adopt an arbitrary but consistent scheme of subject heading forms which users will be expected to master, even as they now have to adapt their personal preferences to conventions in many human relationships.

Other questions regarding the form of subject entries have been raised from time to time and are still under discussion. The perennial problem of deciding when to subordinate place to topic, and vice versa, has never been settled, and Haykin suggests that it may never be.\textsuperscript{28} Studies by Patricia B. Knapp\textsuperscript{42} and Eloise Rue\textsuperscript{43} indicate that present practices are not precisely in agreement with habits of catalog users. Mrs. Knapp has observed that people tend to look under subject for materials having a local or national focus, but under place for those with a nonlocal or foreign focus. The implication in this observation is that standard lists must be so constructed as to allow for this variation from library to library. Thus a catalog in Greensboro,
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North Carolina, would use the entries “Education—Greensboro, N.C.” and “Cleveland, O.—Education,” while the Cleveland Public Library would simply reverse them.

Another feature of general subject heading lists about which there has been extended discussion is the defining of terms. Bishop calls attention to its essentiality in his manual, and Haykin suggests that it is required when general dictionaries and dictionaries in special subject fields do not agree and when usage does not offer a sufficiently precise definition of a subject. Many lists, both general and special, include definitions, and M. J. Voigt’s list of headings for physics provides a good demonstration of their value. From the attention devoted to the need for more of them it appears that the practice in supplying them has not been in line with Haykin’s statement as to when they should be given.

One of the assumptions in subject cataloging has always been that a special library which concentrates on a particular subject field, or which tries to render more specialized services than a general library does, will require a particular list of subject headings, and perhaps even a special classification system, in order to meet the needs of its clientele. Doris Bolef’s study of subject cataloging practices in a number of special libraries in the New York City area, and her evaluation of a number of special subject heading lists, has led her to the conclusion that a special library ordinarily does need a subject heading list incorporating more specific and detailed headings than those employed in a general library. H. T. Black, in turn, has pointed to the need for more special lists and has attested to their usefulness even in general libraries.

Some indication of the number of special subject heading schemes available may be derived from the following statistics. In 1940, Black enumerated forty-four in his checklist; in 1952, the Committee on Subject Headings of the A.L.A. Division of Cataloging and Classification identified forty-eight compiled between 1938 and 1952. Of these forty-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Black, 1940</th>
<th>A.L.A., 1952</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Art, Music, Theology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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TABLE 1
Special Subject Heading Lists
eight, only two appeared in the previous count. Thus at least ninety special lists have been developed, mostly since 1916. Table 1 compares their distribution by broad subjects. While the social sciences still boast the largest number, the increase for scientific and technological subjects during the past fourteen years testifies to the greater interest in these areas in the war and postwar periods.

Another indication of the need for special subject heading schemes is the interest shown by various groups of specialists. In particular that of the medical profession should be noted. Since 1948 the Welch Medical Library at John Hopkins University has been making an intensive study of medical indexing under the terms of a research project sponsored by the Armed Forces Medical Library. Established to examine the problems in indexing medical literature, to explore the theory and practice of subject headings and classification as they relate to medical literature, and to consider existing and projected machine methods applicable to medical bibliography, the undertaking has made considerable review of various lists of subject headings pertaining to medical literature. Of particular interest is the technique of category analysis, which has been used to rationalize the content and structure of alphabetic subject heading lists. Through this method, as described by Taine and F. B. Rogers, all of the headings and references which relate to a particular category are assembled in a single enumeration, so that it becomes possible to observe whether there is any overlapping in terms, any inconsistency in form, or any defect in the reference structure. Hilda Steinweg has demonstrated the value of the same technique for rationalizing subject headings and references in political science. Superficially, at least, it appears that it should be valuable in improving any subject heading plan.

In her New York study referred to above, Mrs. Bolef suggests certain standards for subject headings in special library catalogs. She suggests that (1) the heading should be as specific as the subject matter of the material to which it is being applied, (2) new headings should be introduced as rapidly as the need for them is recognized, (3) headings should be defined as necessary and distinctions between terms clearly described, (4) headings should reflect the use habits of the clientele served and popular or scientific terms chosen according to the preference of the clientele, (5) headings should be consistent in form, (6) inverted and subdivided headings should be held to a minimum, (7) every cross reference should serve a specific function, (8) standard subdivisions should be utilized where they are appro-
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appropriate, and (9) large blocks of headings should not begin with the noun or nouns representing the chief subject interest of the library.

The similarity of these standards to those outlined by Haykin suggests that when we have succeeded in defining the objectives of subject cataloging, we shall find little variation in objective between subject cataloging in general libraries and in special libraries, but rather a variable need for specificity, and a practical requirement that there be certain options in the form of heading in order to avoid a concentration of subject entries under, for example, "Education" in a teachers' college library. Moreover, as Black has pointed out, many general libraries have special collections which require unusual subject treatment in order to make them most helpful. Thus it seems that special subject heading lists will have greatest value when they are designed to dovetail with standard lists, so that they prescribe optional expansions for a variety of subject fields. A norm for subject cataloging techniques will then have been established. This should make it easier for the public to understand and to use subject catalogs, since there will be fewer variant practices. It should also open up new avenues to cooperative subject cataloging.

The A.L.A. Division of Cataloging and Classification, through its Board on Cataloging Policy and Research, is preparing to study the problem of integrating general and special subject heading lists, and some progress in this direction may be anticipated. That it can be hoped for is evident from Hazel C. Benjamin's account of the compilation of the new standard list of subject headings for industrial relations libraries. This list, in its final form, is so constructed that it can be used with the L.C. list without disrupting the pattern or the applications of L.C. headings.

It is premature to suggest the directions integration may take, assuming that study of the problems involved shows it to be possible. But the development of present subject cataloging procedures, and existing evidence of the ways in which subject catalogs are used, make it possible to state some tentative assumptions. First, the tendency of subject headings found in the general lists to become more specific, when taken with the expressed needs of special libraries for specific subject approaches to their materials, suggests that the plan for integration will look toward an increasing number of direct and specific headings, with a minimum of inversion, fewer subdivided forms, and more phrase-type headings. Second, since it may prove difficult to accommodate the varieties of verbal and terminological pat-
terns likely to be found among the diverse classes of users and different groups of specialists, some agreement upon a common standard representing the habits and preferences of a cross-section of those who consult subject catalogs is likely to be necessary. Intensified efforts to acquaint users with this standard will be required. Third, since some subdivision of headings will be unavoidable, particularly that by form, a standard list of subdivisions to be applied as desired will be a feature of the integrated lists. Fourth, conventions for such techniques as the subdivision of place by topic and topic by place will be flexible, so as to permit each library to select that approach which seems most serviceable for its clientele. Fifth, some option in utilizing particular terms as independent headings or as subdivisions will be necessary. Sixth, greater emphasis will be given to providing definitions and scope notes, both in the general and the special lists, in order to make the distinctions in meaning and in use which probably will be essential. And seventh, the development of special lists as optional extensions of general ones, together with the need to provide for alternative approaches in both general and special lists, will result in the disappearance of the systematic reference structure of the catalog which Miss Pettee and others have held to be necessary. In its place will be substituted a purely utilitarian framework, designed to provide no more than essential correlation between particular specific headings, and of course, needed references from terms not employed to those which are.

In other words, a workable plan for integration of general and special subject heading lists will recognize at the outset that if the reader is to be the focus, standards must take formal notice of individual differences. Such differences may mean that the subject catalog requirements in one library or in one community will be quite unlike those in another, though R. R. Irwin has suggested that the variations in approach to the catalog we have assumed do not exist. His evidence is limited, however, and until corroborative information is available from a more extended study, we must accept the subjective opinions of librarians that there are discrete local needs for which provision must be made.

In this assessment of current developments in subject cataloging it will be noted that relatively few references have been made to developments in foreign countries. In general, other countries have not evolved subject catalogs which correspond to our own in any large numbers, so that the problems of American and foreign libraries
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are not precisely the same. Few standard lists of subject headings have been devised in other countries, and when they have, they show strong influence of American practice. It may be said in general that where the alphabetical subject catalog is adopted, the problems to be solved will resemble those which have been noted in this paper. If the classed catalog is the form accepted, other questions beyond the scope of this discussion will have to be considered. K. L. Taylor and Harry Dewey have suggested some of these. The catchword subject on the other hand is a hybrid animal, whose permutations are not susceptible either of orderly discussion or codification, and need not concern us here. Since classed and catchword subject catalogs are more common in other countries than alphabetic ones, it is not surprising that most foreign discussions of subject cataloging problems relate to these types. We must not forget, however, that the only comprehensive code for modern subject cataloging practice prior to the appearance of Haykin’s manual was in the Vatican rules.

It has not been possible within the confines of this paper to refer to all of the topics which have been discussed in the literature of subject cataloging. Rather an attempt has been made to select those issues which appear to be basic to the future of subject cataloging, and to indicate the present state of thinking about them. What does it all add up to? What are the implications for the future?

Two main questions run through discussions of the total cataloging process, viz.: (1) How may the effectiveness of the techniques for organizing library materials be improved? (2) How may these techniques be managed so that their cost will not require an excessive portion of library budgets? Too many cataloging procedures are based upon tradition, and for too many years these traditions have gone unchallenged. It has now become necessary to inquire into the real purposes of the various cataloging activities, to assess the appropriateness of the methods to serve them, and to seek alternative means which will serve them better.

In particular, concern for the user of libraries has been given renewed emphasis. Subject cataloging, like rules for author and title entry and conventions for descriptive cataloging, has developed in a haphazard way and, as this paper attempts to show, without any clear understanding of what its true function in libraries might be. Rationalization of the descriptive cataloging code and of the rules for author and title entry has been given first attention. And while study of these phases of cataloging is not yet complete, the subject cataloging process
is beginning to receive its share of scrutiny. To effect the improvement sought in subject cataloging will require (1) that we find out more about who uses the subject catalog, for what purpose, and in what way; (2) that we define the function of the subject catalog in the light of this knowledge, and spell out a code of practice to facilitate the construction of subject catalogs for all types and sizes of libraries; (3) that we develop both standard and specialized lists of subject headings in accord with this function and code; and (4) that we make use of our code and our lists to exploit the possibilities of cooperative cataloging in obtaining more complete and more effective subject control of library materials at less cost.

It is not likely that subject catalogs will disappear. For we are beginning again to recognize, as Bishop did in 1906, that “Our aim as librarians is not merely to accumulate books. It is to help the reader to the books he wants—or ought to want. In a large library the only tool which accomplishes this result is the catalog, and of this the subject catalog is the part most difficult to make, most useful when well made.”

References

5. Ibid., p. 1.
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16. Ladenson, Alex: Application and Limitations of Subject Headings; the Social Sciences, in Tauber, op. cit., ref. 14, pp. 64-72.
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