

Non-Western Languages and Literatures in the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme

EUNICE KUA, MSI (LIS)

School of Information, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

A classification scheme reinforces the social systems that were in place at the time the system was devised, and projects, no matter how subtly or ineffectively, the social, moral and intellectual values of that system. The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) scheme is the most widely used library classification scheme in the world today; it is based on the shape of the 19th century North American academic world, and shows a distinct bias no longer acceptable for libraries

of the 21st century. Non-Western languages and literatures are given short shrift in classes 400 and 800 of the DDC. The situation of African languages and literatures is a case in point. Attempts at official and local revisions have been made, but more systemic efforts are necessary. The problem is complex and there are no easy answers. Nevertheless, national libraries should step forward to address the issue, and the new models for adapting the DDC should be investigated.

Introduction

Setting up a library in a rural high school in South Africa recently, my teammates and I were dealing with literature in three languages – English, Xitsonga and Afrikaans. Tackling the task of classification, we found “English” easily enough on the Dewey Decimal Classification chart, 820. But for Xitsonga and Afrikaans, there is only “African languages,” 896. Only Western languages were listed by name on the chart, filling up almost the entire 800 section: English, French, German ... and African languages. Xitsonga, the local language, was not on this classification map.

What does it say to a child, when all the categories in a system seem to accentuate what is not yours, while all the practices and wisdom of your culture are relegated to a tiny sliver of space? What is it like to grow up in a world where unfamiliar languages are revered, where your mother tongue may be good and useful for everyday life, but is not a vehicle for advancement? “Learn

this system,” we said, “and you will be able to use the resources of any library in the world.” Schoolteachers and administrators were enthusiastic. Yet why does education and breaking out of the modern-day oppression of low socioeconomic status involve adopting legacy models with overtones of white and Western oppression? Does this “universal” scheme really represent the whole realm of human knowledge? If this is how the world is organized, where does that leave you and your culture in the grand scheme of things?

“... Each category valorizes some point of view and silences another. This is not inherently a bad thing – indeed it is inescapable. But it is an ethical choice,” state Bowker and Star (1999, 6). Can the arrangement of books on a shelf really have an impact on how we think about the world? It seems rather ludicrous. Yet creating classes and categories is inherent to how we live; it is part of our daily activity; it has implications on how we see and interact with the world.

Eunice Kua, Current address: 921 Church St #301, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, USA. Phone: (734) 332-1569; Summer address: 8943 Lombard Place #310, San Diego, CA 92122, USA. Phone: (858) 587-9702; Email: eskua@si.umich.edu. Homepage: http://www-personal.si.umich.edu/~eskua/ekua_resume.doc

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A classification scheme reinforces the social systems that were in place at the time the system was devised, and projects, no matter how subtly or ineffectively, the social, moral and intellectual values of that system. How we arrange books on a shelf both reflects and shapes our perceptions about the proper order of things. How an individual collection is arranged may have few repercussions. However, when an organization scheme is used in 200,000 libraries in 135 countries and over 30 languages (OCLC, 1), there is cause for concern.

This paper will focus on the treatment of non-Western language and literature in the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. After a brief overview of the DDC, it discusses classes 400 and 800 – language and literature, respectively, identifies biases inherent in each, and gives the case example of the language and literature of Africa. It then reviews efforts to revise the DDC and offers reflections on what needs to be done and what obstacles are in the way. The paper concludes with recommendations toward more equitable treatment of languages and literature in the DDC.

The DDC in context

The Dewey Decimal Classification system was the 19th century brainchild of Melvil Dewey, an energetic library and education reformer and businessman. Building on a scheme devised by Francis Bacon in medieval times and adapted in the 19th century by St. Louis Public Schools superintendent William T. Harris for use in a school library, Dewey, at the age of 21, came up with a system that was simple to use and widely adopted by the emerging public libraries of his day (Shera, 77–84; Wiegand, 176–177, 190; OCLC). His scheme operated on basic assumptions of classical Western thought, i.e., a belief in a universal order of nature and a fixed, hierarchical organization of knowledge (Shera, 78; Drabenstott 2003). More specifically, according to Wiegand (1998), Dewey's categories were crafted on the basis of the Amherst College curriculum, textbooks and faculty opinions of the time. Olson (2000) has analyzed and shown how the DDC classes correspond to trends in Western philosophy. It is, thus, a definite Western classical-Anglo Saxon Protestant scholarly worldview of a particular era (Wiegand 1998)

that informed the decisions that set the classes and sub-classes in place.

The DDC today is the most widely used classification scheme in the world (IFLA 2003). As alluded to earlier, it appears in 135 countries, with translations complete or in progress in over 30 languages, including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Icelandic, Italian, Korean, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese (OCLC). Available in print and on the Web, it is considered by some to be “arguably the most important bibliographic classification scheme” (Rowley, 201), and “as an international classification, ... probably the most pragmatic, efficient, and economical choice” (Durlík 2002), due to its relative simplicity, its extensive adoption by public and school libraries, and its continued revision and upkeep.

Yet the system is problematic even in its core structure. Dividing the entire universe of knowledge into ten main classes is an audacious proposition, and trying to fit everything that has ever been written into those 10 classes is rather incredible (see Figure 1, Appendix, for the ten classes). The main classes, furthermore, are arranged not by subject, but by academic discipline (Dewey for Windows 1998, quoted in Olson). The entire system is based on the shape of the 19th century North American academic world, and what paths scholars chose to investigate and acquire knowledge then. Not only has the shape of the scholarly world changed since then (and thus Philosophy and Psychology, for example, no longer seem to go together), but the balance and volume of material on different topics have also shifted (Rowley 1996, 202).

In addition, classes such as Language (400) are located far away from Literature (800); Technology (600) contains many overlapping concerns with Science (500); Buildings (690) is removed from Architecture (720) (Rowley 1996, 202). These designations appear to be artifacts of the Baconian thinking on which the scheme is based (Olson 2000, 117); the order and contents of the classes, removed from the underlying thought structure (explained in Scott 1998, 13), can seem whimsical and counter-intuitive to the modern user.

The DDC is owned by the OCLC Online Computer Library Center in Dublin, Ohio, and maintained and updated by the U.S. Library of Congress Decimal Classification Division. It is

Figure 2. Subclasses within class 400 Language and class 800 Literature

400 Language	800 Literature, rhetoric & criticism
410 Linguistics	810 American literature in English
420 English & Old English	820 English & Old English literatures
430 German & related languages	830 German & related literatures
440 French & related languages	840 French & related literatures
450 Italian, Romanian & related languages	850 Italian, Romanian & related literatures
460 Spanish & Portuguese languages	860 Spanish & Portuguese literatures
470 Latin & Italic languages	870 Latin & Italic literatures
480 Classical & modern Greek languages	880 Classical & modern Greek literatures
490 Other languages	890 Other literatures

Source: WebDewey (DDC 22)

in its 22nd edition, affectionately known as “DDC 22.”

DDC Classes 400 and 800

DDC Class 400 is for Language, and class 800 is for Literature. The following figure shows the subclasses (hundreds) within each of these classes.

Class 400 represents the discipline of linguistics. The first subclass (400) is used for general works on philosophy and theory of language. The second subclass (410) is used for Linguistics, “... the structure of spoken and written language in general” (Scott, p. 110). The next seven subclasses, 420–480, are devoted to the study of specific European languages, mostly from Western Europe. The final subclass, 490, holds all the world’s other languages, including African, Asian, Oceanic, Semitic and Native American languages.

Thus, while an entire subclass is devoted to French (440 French, 441 French writing systems, 442 French etymology, 448 Standard French usage), Chinese, the world’s most widely spoken language (about 900 million speakers (Turner, 2001)), starts at 495.1, i.e., three subdivisions deeper in the hierarchy (490 Other languages, 495 East and Southeast Asian languages, 495.1 Chinese). French grammar is assigned the base number 445; Chinese grammar starts at 495.15. In fact, of the world’s 10 most widely spoken languages, only four are in the 420–480 range (English, Spanish, Portuguese and German). The rest are located in

Figure 3. Languages in subclasses 490 and 890

490 Other Languages	890 Literatures of other languages
491 East Indo-European & Celtic languages	891 East Indo-European & Celtic literatures
492 Afro-Asiatic languages, Semitic languages	892 Afro-Asiatic languages, Semitic literatures
493 Non-Semitic Afro-Asiatic languages	893 Non-Semitic Afro-Asiatic literatures
494 Altaic, Uralic, Hyperborean & Dravidian languages	894 Altaic, Uralic, Hyperborean & Dravidian literatures
495 Languages of East & Southeast Asia, Sino-Tibetan languages	895 Languages of East & Southeast Asia, Sino-Tibetan literatures
496 African languages	896 African literatures
497 North American native languages	897 North American native literatures
498 South American native languages	898 South American native literatures
499 Non-Austronesian languages of Oceania, Austronesian languages, miscellaneous languages	899 Non-Austronesian literatures of Oceania, Austronesian literatures, miscellaneous literatures

Source: WebDewey (DDC 22)

490, i.e., Bengali, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic, Russian and Japanese (Turner 2001).

There is obviously an imbalance here, with a definite Western bias. Even the languages of Eastern Europe find little room, being also located in 490 “Other Languages” (see 491 in Figure 3 below).

Class 800, for literature, has an additional, and more complex, set of problems. The primary organizing principle for this category is language. The literatures are organized first by language (820–890 represent literatures of specific languages – 820 English, 830 German, 840 French ...), then by form or genre (820 English, 821 English poetry, 822 English drama, 823 English fiction ...). Thereafter, works may be classified by period, by subject, by author, by geographic region, and so on. One problem with organizing the literature section by language, and the one that is most cited, is this ordering of classification facets breaks up national literatures of countries that employ more than one language.

The literature of Canada or South Africa, for example, resides in different places on the shelf. Revisiting Olson’s (2001) examples, browsing the Relative Index of DDC 22 through WebDewey for “Canadian literature” brings up the following:

- Canadian literature – English 810 [American literature in English]
- Canadian literature – French 840
- Canadian literature – Inuit 897.2

Similarly, for “South African literature,”

- South African literature – Afrikaans 839.36
- South African literature – Bantu languages 896.36
- South African literature – English 820

This can also be demonstrated with “Swiss literature” (which returns French, German, and Italian) and “Indian literature” (Dravidian, English, Indic). Whether Western or non-Western, preferring the language facet in literature results in this dispersion for literatures from multilingual societies, a context which is particularly true for once-colonized countries in Africa, South and Southeast Asia.

While the Western language imbalance can be readily explained in light of the 19th century college curriculum on which the DDC was based, it is a huge incongruity for a system of the 21st century. Some may attempt to rationalize the proportions in terms of literary warrant, and true enough, there are likely to be less works in and about some of the “Other Languages” than about the “major” languages as defined here. But this reasoning cannot justify the magnitude of the disparity between the standard or traditionally taught languages of the West, and all the other languages of the world.

When employed in Class 800 for literature, the breakdown seems even more disproportionate. Consider, for example, Greek and Latin, which have been studied for centuries, yet are now largely the province of theologians and classicists. Compare this with Russian, Arabic, or Chinese, which have long and extensive literary traditions in their own right. Allocating a subclass for each classical language and only sub-sub-subclasses for equally important languages is archaic at best, and inexcusable if a system is intended for international use.

Privileging language in the literature class not only scatters a national literature; it also privileges the language of the oppressor, in the case of many once-colonized nations. It gives precedence to the language of the former colonizer at the expense

of a former colony’s corpus, and/or subsumes this corpus under the colonizer’s subclass. This is a grave matter for some, “smack[ing] of cultural imperialism” (Matare 1997). It can signify a continued declaration of one country’s cultural and linguistic superiority over another, although political and social realities may have changed.

Pacey (1989, 104) argues that, “while language is an active, shaping ingredient in the development of a literature, it is not a literature’s only root ...”; Amaeshi (1985, 43) reminds of Bliss’ principle that “a good classification scheme should result in ‘consistent collocation of closely related subjects for convenience in reference and research’”, and while wrestling with the problem of how to work around the primacy of language, asserts that African, Latin American, and other literatures, have reached a point of deserving recognition as distinct entities and subjects of research. Olson (2001) and Pacey (1989) also point out that American literature in English, subclass 810, represents a deviation from the language-first rule and is an indication of how national clout, rather than inherent principles, may influence classification.

In addition to all this, there are other issues, small but perhaps still significant, with making language or some other facet pre-eminent: what about bilingual authors, i.e., authors who produce work in more than one language (Amaeshi 1985, 47)? In a language-first scheme, their work will not be collocated. What about authors of a diaspora, who are no longer located geographically in or even citizens of the country of origin (South Asian authors in England, or Haitian authors in the U.S., for example)? In a place-first scheme, which country do they belong to? In a place-first scheme, too, what happens if national boundaries change, as they sometimes do?

Finally, though it is classes 400 and 800 that are the focus here, it is pertinent to note that class 800 is described as covering “literature, and includes rhetoric, prose, poetry, drama, etc,” but “folk literature is classed with customs in [class] 300” (OCLC 2003). The separation of literary work and folklore potentially leads to further fragmentation, especially in cultures such as those of Africa, where there is a strong oral tradition, and the boundaries between literature and folk literature are blurred (the ambiguity occurs even in Western classical tradition – should Homer’s epics

and Virgil's Aeneid be considered literature or folk literature? (They are often considered literature.)

Case: African language and literature

The point about imbalance in significance given to African languages has been made, in the discussion of the issue as seen in class 400. Even well-known and relatively widely-spoken and -studied African languages like Swahili and Zulu require large Dewey numbers, with many levels and decimal points before they are identified (for instance, Swahili: 496 African languages, 496.3 Niger-Congo languages, 496.39 Bantu languages, 496.392 Kiswahili. For Zulu, it goes down the same tree, and one more step, to reach the correct base number of 496.3986). As can be seen, the problem with the DDC is not that it cannot accommodate these languages; it is adopted and feted because it can (this, some say, is its genius). The problem is that it relegates non-Western languages, and thus the people who speak these languages, to being afterthoughts in its organization of knowledge. This is a holdover from the Eurocentric view of the world that reinforces colonial perspectives and mentalities, and this is not an equitable, let alone enlightening, way for a library to function.

Pacey (1989, 103) presents African literature as a case in point for his article. His example shows how "African literature is scattered between, and within, a number of language groups ...

- 820 English
- 839.31 Dutch
- 839.36 Afrikaans
- 840 French
- 860 Spanish
- 869 Portuguese
- 892 Arabic and Ethiopic languages
- 893 Hamitic and Chad languages
- 896 African languages."

A similar example, in Mowery (1980, 81), includes 893.72 Hausa literature, 896.332 Ibo literature, 896.333 Yoruba literature, and 896.392 Swahili literature. While these lists cover the whole con-

continent rather than just one country, taking any one African country would show similar fragmentation, since each of them would have the colonist 's language (mainly English or French), and any number of different tribal languages, represented within its boundaries. South Africa has 11 official languages; Cameroon has 2 official languages (French and English) and 24 major African language groups; Nigeria has 5 major languages (English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), and Fulani); Morocco has Arabic as the official language, "various Berber dialects," and French as the "language of business, government and diplomacy" (CIA World Factbook 2003). The incorporation of colonial languages into the fabric of urban, literate society in many countries perhaps makes the situation of large Dewey numbers for indigenous literatures less desperate, since colonial languages also are used, but it reinforces the need for change, due to the problem of subordination of indigenous languages. Classification, as we have seen, reflects and reinforces social systems and shapes concepts of order.

Interestingly, both Pacey (1989) and Amaeshi (1985) see African literature as a distinct, continental corpus, rather than as a collection of national literatures. This could be because in Africa, national lines were often drawn arbitrarily by colonial powers, and/or because, as both assert (Pacey probably following Amaeshi) that African literature "forms a coherent whole, representing an African consciousness and common heritage" (Pacey 1989, 103). The reason could also be pragmatic, with African literature as a whole having more literary warrant, as it were, than the literature of any one national or linguistic group within the continent. Amaeshi (1985, 40) partly acknowledges this, in his assertion that "... in spite of the variety of languages in which Africans write, their literatures taken as a whole represent an African consciousness of the world, are studied together, and demand a specific identity in the major classification schemes". While the finer points of how to classify African literature and how valid the concept of an "African consciousness" is may and should be debated, the larger concern is that Africa is home to and the subject of a vast body of knowledge; that it has a corpus of scholarly and literary work; and that its place in the grand scheme of things, as represented by the DDC, needs to be significantly acknowledged.

Official DDC revisions

New editions of the DDC feature revisions that are meant to address historical Anglo-American biases and “accommodate differences in literature, history, ethnicity, philosophy, religion and law for various countries or cultures” (IFLA 1996). DDC 21 and 22 feature revisions most notably in class 200 Religion; however, by and large, there do not appear to be substantial revisions or even interest in systemic revisions to the classes for language and literature.

Recent editions have not addressed questions such as those raised here at any level. There is an overall interest in dealing with bias in the system. There is a desire to internationalize the DDC through a multinational Editorial Policy Committee (EPC), user surveys of librarians and subject experts from different countries, partnerships with national libraries, and translation. A section on the “Influence of Dewey users around the world” in the announcement of DDC 22 reflects the DDC’s acknowledgement of its worldwide constituency. Nevertheless, much more could be done. The EPC consists only of members from major English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, UK, US); user surveys were slightly more diverse in geography, but still only looked at Australia, Hong Kong, Italy, UK and the US. And though certain problems in classes 400 and 800 have been known for some time, and a DDC editor himself has called for fundamental change (Scott 1998, 109, 161), no efforts to address these problems have been made.

Local DDC revisions

As might be expected, libraries in non-Western countries have addressed the bias and fragmentation problems on their own and have made adjustments in various ways.

A common solution to the problem of national languages and literatures has been to assign the first subclass, 410 or 810, to the national language or literature; precedent for this has been set, most obviously, with 810 American literature in English. The strategy has been applied in libraries in the Middle East (where in the 1960’s, Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan assigned 410 to Arabic language and 810 to Arabic literature (Soltani 1995)), and in Southeast Asia

(where 410 would be Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia, and 810 would be literature in Bahasa Indonesia (Soekarman 1993)). One potential problem with this approach, in class 400, is for the situation in which there is no single national language. Only one “locally prominent” (Olson 2001) language receives the expansion; as we have seen, many societies are multilingual, and may have more than one language that deserves prominence. There is the possibility of introducing intra-country bias, unreasonably privileging the language of one ethnic group over another. Choices do have to be made, and national languages are often chosen at the expense of others. However, this is an issue to be aware of in classification as well.

Another problem with the 810 suggestion is that it does really not solve the problems created by language primacy in class 800. Subclass 810, when it has been used for expansion, is still literature in a certain language – American literature in English, Indonesian literature in Indonesian, Arabic literature (in Arab countries). National literature in various languages is still stymied. In Singapore, for example, would 810 be Singaporean literature in English, or Singaporean literature in Chinese? In Kenya, would it be Kenyan literature in English, or Kenyan literature in Swahili? In Haiti, French or Haitian Creole? (Note also that “national” literature should refer to prominent literature of a certain nation, regardless of whether or not the language used is officially designated a national language; in many cases, locally prominent languages are also official, but not always, and vice versa). Perhaps a better ordering of facets, for this purpose, would be place first, then language, then genre.

DDC also provides an alternative suggestion of using a letter in the notation, e.g. 8C0 for Canadian literature (Olson 2001). This method has been used in Iran (where 4F0 was used for Farsi language, and 8F0 for literature in Farsi (Soltani 1995)). Using letter notation creatively, a librarian could conceivably get around the limitation of a single language and assign different letters for national literature of different languages. This would be a neat, economical solution. However, the addition of a Roman alphabet letter disrupts the consistency of the simple, purely numeric notation that is one of the DDC’s key merits. It may also be confusing to users, who may not

know how the mixed number relates to other numbers, and find difficulty in becoming familiar with the system (8C0 would come before 810 (Olson 2001), but this would run counter to extensive prior experience with alphabetic lists, where numbers come before letters; also, the Iranian system, following DDC in 1971–1972, put 4F0 before 420 (Soltani 1995)). Furthermore, there appears to have been inconsistency, perhaps from one edition to another, on the placement of the letter, whether in the middle, as above, or in front, e.g. C820 for Canadian literature in English or N820 for Nigerian literature in English (Soekarman 1993, Preface; Mowery 1980, 80). The system could be a viable solution for multilingual contexts, though, where it would take care of the multiple languages and also provide enough volume of alphabetic content to allow the user to visually and mentally separate the two schemes and navigate the alphabetic and numeric notations as usual.

Issues with revisions

The DDC is a hierarchical classification, with elements of faceted classification built in. The concept of hierarchy – going from broad to specific – works fine for class 400 Languages, since it is organized by linguistic families, which is itself a hierarchical structure. The facet of linguistic discipline is then applied, and the result is a relatively clean and efficient system. Revisions to reduce bias in class 400, as depicted in the discussion here, would need to be in terms of linguistic families and the relative locations and space allotted. It would not be a mere expansion on existing numbers, nor would it be a change in the structure of the system itself. It would be reorganization of content. Thus it would be more akin to an expansion, since it does not require infrastructural change; however, it goes beyond doling out more numbers; it calls for relocation, something like what has been done with class 200 Religion in the last two revisions of DDC and more, requiring an even more radical redistribution than was seen there.

Revisions to address the fragmentation problems in class 800 would be rather more problematic than class 400 revisions. Here, the classification is faceted, with the primary facets of language, form or genre, supplemented by secondary facets of period, place, author and subject. Due to the

complex nature of literary works, facet analysis is an appropriate way to approach classification in this area. The problem lies in the nature and citation order of the facets. Should language continue to be the primary facet? Are there other facets that should be included? Would a reordering of existing facets perhaps alleviate the problem?

Amaeshi (1985) proposes having African literature as a subclass under language. His scheme is for the Library of Congress system, but his critique, and presumably, his solution, is applicable to both LC and DDC. He also proposes a fifth facet, “cultural”, to complement the four “traditional” facets of literature he cites (language, form, author, and work). Pacey’s (1989) pragmatic suggestion is similar – he proposes subdividing, after language, by “cultural/geographic area” rather than by literary form; the third facet would then be form.

Olson (2001) also mentions creative varying of citation order, but does not provide a concrete suggestion. This turns out to be wise, since both Amaeshi and Pacey’s propositions, though straightforward to implement, are too simplistic and create problems of their own. For instance, how do we know that users would prefer collocation by place rather than by form? What if I’m looking for a good book of poems? This solution should therefore be applied with care, and would probably be applicable only to specific libraries.

The same objection applies also to Pacey’s (1989, 107) “radical approach”, where he suggests throwing out the language-first rule, and using cultural/geographic entities as the primary facet instead. Not only is it unclear whether users would be overall better served by a cultural/geographic focus, the concept of a cultural/geographic entity itself is somewhat fuzzy. It could be problematic to even create such a facet, deciding what marks the boundaries from one cultural/geographic entity to another.

Finally, the DDC is useful because it is simple to use and because it has been widely adopted. Substantial local revisions may damage the utility gained from universality; part of the reason for systematic classification is to allow for ease of use and transferability of knowledge. If I change my system so it is no longer similar to other systems, is it as useful anymore? Does the library lose some of its functionality by not being in line with the “in-crowd”, i.e., other libraries using a more

universal system? What if everyone decides to customize so much that there is no longer an “in-crowd,” and everyone is an outsider? What happens then to the wonderful world of library cooperation and of users easily navigating one library or another? Further, what if, as Durlik (2002) indicates, local revision attempts result in internal inconsistency and damage to the integrity of the system? Olson (2001, 121) does not seem fazed by these scenarios. She concludes that she would “like to build on the idea of diversity rather than universality,” that this would better serve “diverse users and collections” and decrease bias. She advocates “a variety of approaches” and asserts that, “we [can] not have a universal solution.”

Conclusion

As we have seen, the DDC is able to expand to accommodate historically under-defined or recognized languages and literatures. Despite this adaptability, though, the problem with of marginalization of non-Western languages and literatures is more fundamental. The allocation of space and numbers to these languages is extremely imbalanced, and the phenomenon of multilingual national literatures is in no way adequately addressed. DDC, as an international system, needs change.

A call for national library responsibility

Centralized revision of the DDC by the Library of Congress is good but not enough. With the multiplicity of needs and cultures, besides, the “official” DDC will never be able to fully address the diverse contexts of its users. The burden of adapting the DDC for a non-Western audience thus falls to the places where those audiences are to be found most – outside the United States and Western Europe.

National libraries are well positioned to take on the responsibility of DDC revision for local contexts, for a number of reasons. One, they are more likely than individual libraries to have the resources necessary to devote to such an endeavor; two, this is precisely the sort of task that falls within their portfolio; and three, the systemic nature and authority of a national system would sit well with needs for standardization of the classification. It is better to have a single over-

arching revision (which could, as usual, be further modified for use by individual libraries) for a country, than numerous modifications by different local provincial libraries, addressing the same problems. There is no need to duplicate labor, and a more universal system, at least at the country level, would assist cooperation efforts.

Matare (1997), addressing African librarians in a somewhat more scathing call, says this: “The Western classification and cataloging rules are used in most African libraries but they are irrelevant to the needs of Africa It seems African librarians haven’t bothered to develop classification schemes that are relevant to the needs of Africa ... Africa needs classification schemes that take into consideration the diversity of African culture. Africans need to think beyond DDC, UDC, LC and AACR ...”

Note that the call for national initiatives does not preclude the need for central, “official” DDC to continue its efforts, or for Western librarians (as they have done for decades, when colleagues in other countries were either non-existent or unable to voice their concerns) to advocate for change. Revisions on the local or national level are a pragmatic solution, and do not address more systemic problems. Further, the “non-Western” audience, peoples historically ignored in a Eurocentric model, live also within the bounds of “Western” countries – the United States and Western Europe. They too deserve to see their languages honored, and Western citizenry at large, supposedly the paragons of democracy and civil society for the rest of the world, deserve better models.

A call for new models

Notice there is no serious talk of totally doing away with the DDC and coming up with an entirely new system. There have been various inventive classification schemes in the course of library history – Ranganathan’s Colon Classification and Bliss’ Bibliographic Classification; there are other schemes in use, such as IFLA’s Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), and the Library of Congress Classification (LC). Yet the DDC is so prevalent and so widely used that proposed solutions try in some way to work within the DDC framework – basically, there is no other choice.

But who is to say there is no room for anything new? True, the DDC is so widespread it is the model we have to work with. Yet in the neighboring world of cataloging, for instance, new models and emerging standards like FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology) are revolutionizing, or at least, revitalizing, hoary standbys like AACR and LCSH. A new model that could remove the bias of the DDC would require subject experts and classification specialists to work together, sizing up the content, and focusing on the user. International efforts via IFLA or through academic collaboration could be productive. Faceted classification might be the way to go. Further research on facets and how they might be applied and manipulated could deliver a way of renewing DDC from within, since it is already a partially faceted scheme. A revision of the DDC model on a systemic scale could be an exciting and challenging area for classification theory.

In any case, the DDC is here to stay. With 200,000 libraries and a reputation as the classification system, it serves as a library hallmark. The dearth of recent literature on the subject of socio-cultural implications and intellectual biases in the DDC is worrying. It indicates an acceptance of the status quo, which is an efficient and pragmatic but flawed from a cultural viewpoint in its representation of the world of knowledge. It is time for librarians and users to be aware of systemic frameworks in the library, often invisible in the every day. Through the development of culturally sensitive and internationally aware adaptations of the system, if not dramatic overhauls and new models (which, as a caveat, may require physical reorganization beyond their means), libraries can develop better ways to accommodate historically marginalized non-Western languages and literatures in their collections. Perhaps there is still hope and we can bring the DDC into the 21st century.

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Appendix

Figure 1. The DDC's 10 main classes

Main classes	
000	Computer science, information & general works
100	Philosophy & psychology
200	Religion
300	Social sciences
400	Language
500	Science
600	Technology
700	Arts & recreation
800	Literature
900	History & geography

Source: WebDewey (DDC 22)

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