

# Classification in Historico-Psycho-Linguistics, or, The Hemingway Complex and the Salinger- Mailer Syndrome

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The lack of a coherent theory of indexing, particularly of natural language indexing, has long paralyzed practitioners and puzzled teachers. But we should remember that only recently have we admitted that index languages exhibit the same features as any other languages, and should be studied in the same way. Moreover, since we are often perplexed in our interaction with index languages we find ourselves compelled to a branch of psycho-linguistics, and further, since we can see a developmental line, we may even be involved in historico-psycho-linguistics.

The grand daddy of subject heading work was Charles Cutter; in his day it was inevitable and legitimate to expect a simple subject to have a simple name, and for simple subjects to keep themselves to themselves in New England propriety—not to indulge in promiscuous relationships, indiscriminately generating new and unlikely cross disciplines as they began to do in and after (and under the influence of?) the Jazz Age, and in England that period of frivolous excess, the Edwardian Age. So Cutter could put forward a coherent theory of subject headings that was both simple and true, in which the complex subject and the phrase heading were exceptions.

Like all simple, true, and noble principles, Cutter's theory was soon enshrined in a national monument—in this case the Library of Congress. Whether that theory had already died of shock at the turn of the century, and was then embalmed and put out on show in a kind of national tomb of cataloguing while its wisdom was preserved as dogma; or whether it was granted its natural apotheosis and later petrified in the precious stillness of a self-consciousness of responsibility, I would not dare to say. Suffice it that Cutter's simple faith still burns in the heart of the Library of Congress:

though it has guttered more than a little in the face of the hordes of new technologies, the pullulating progeny of cross-disciplines sweeping in across the steppes of the research laboratories, and the impossible and interbred genealogies of the tribes of nomadic neologisms. The old faith saw them only as exceptions to the rule, and was therefore unable to make sense of their heresies—treating them by their appearance rather than by their nature. In the end even the faithful despaired of a faith that seemed unable to comprehend the new world picture, still less explain it. And so they invented coordinate indexing.

It is at this point in time that we may observe the appearance of the Hemingway complex. Hemingway's novels are full of the simple, the true and the good, all expressed in straightforward, simple and true language. It is not that Hemingway is impatient of subtlety, but that he can romantically understand and seek to convey all the implications of an event or a situation in a simple, or simplified, description. So it was with Papa Cutter, so it is still with the Library of Congress.

But time and events overtake us all, and the heroic directness of Hemingway's characters has given way to the hip, the doubting, and the just plain sick. With the realization that the dictionary catalog could not cope with the swinging times of post-World War II the Olympian minds of Cutter and his followers gave way to the restless questioning, the self-conscious humor of Calvin Mooers, Mort Taube, Ralph Shaw and their generation of the new men.

Like all new movements coordinate indexing fed on the scraps and shreds of the carcass of its predecessor. Where two or three subject headings had been sufficient before, now a dozen, or even more, headings of the Library of Congress (of which my favorite is *one legged*

*resting*, with its reference *standing on one leg*) there they were virtually irreducible fragments of meaning. Even the names they were given (Zator, Uniterm) remind us that the late 40's and early 50's were the heyday of respectable science fiction when Ray Bradbury and Theodore Sturgeon and *Astounding Science Fiction* were first attracting the attention of serious literary critics.

The Salinger-Mailer syndrome was evident in the assumption that even 30 of these tiny terms would hardly be sufficient to describe a document. For the older attempts to strike truly to the heart of the situation and to convey all its tenderness of terms, a kaleidoscope of glittering fragments would be needed. Remember the catalogs of items with which Salinger conveys the atmosphere of a room, and the lists of epithets with which Mailer will describe a character?

This is the age of the disconnected, the immediate man, the happening—the age indeed of surrealism finally realized—and coordinate indexing is understandably an appropriate form.

While all this was going on, England and the continent of Europe had taken a different direction. The influence of *UDC*, and the teaching of Ranganathan resulted in the formation of the Classification Research Group. Rather than shrink from the inadequacies of the bland and generalized structures of DC and LC they plunged inside them, to explore the interior space. Using the formulas of Ranganathan they constructed more and more (and smaller and smaller) special classifications, on the synthetic principle that became known as faceted because each of the aspects or facets of a subject could be combined with others to make up hitherto unspecified and highly complex descriptions—tiny polished jeweled micro-classifications that became so small and so esoteric that it would not have been surprising to see them engraved on the head of a pin.

The latest manifestation is an even more theoretically complex form called PRECIS (Preserved Context Indexing System) derived from a new kind of general faceted classification so mandarin that it has no real form and has not yet even been published. This is of course the ultimate in classification theory--the scheme that is theoretically perfect and so complex in its multidimensional categories, facets and relationships, that most of it is invisible in dimensions beyond our normal three.

It is at this point that we might think of changing the "psycho-" in our study's name to psychic. Consideration is now being given to relocating the research in Duke University.