

The Problems of Documentary Classification in Online Library Catalogues

In Hungarian libraries the traditional card catalogues have been replaced with databases on computers. The records of these databases are made up of the bibliographical data – including UDC codes – which were once registered on catalogue cards.

UDC is one of the most widely used information retrieval languages. It has been used in Hungarian libraries for a rather long time. My lecture is centred on UDC. I would like to mention several problems related to it and I am going to try to summarise what possible solutions come into consideration.

1. Expressing UDC codes in natural language

The UDC system uses an artificial information retrieval language. Thus we cannot decipher its meaning at first sight and so cannot benefit from it directly. Therefore UDC codes should be accompanied by their definitions or meanings. It would be important to integrate the Hungarian translation of the concise English edition of UDC into the databases of Hungarian libraries. This translation is available in the Library Institute and has been adapted for use on the computer.

2. Retrospective documentary classification

UDC codes can enter the database in two ways: on the one hand by the documentary classification of new books and on the other hand by the retrospective data entry of old books. This way the online catalogue is continually extending. However, invalid UDC codes from old UDC editions are also added to it from time to time. The invalid UDC codes are then listed in the browser among the current and valid ones without any distinction. Therefore the browser doesn't fulfil the requirements of information retrieval languages.

The codes with identical meanings, in other words synonyms, should be linked and provided with cross-references. The codes identical in form but different in their meanings should be distinguished. With attached cross-references UDC could meet the requirements of information retrieval languages.

In this respect, a Hungarian translation of the concise English edition of UDC would again be of great help.

Finally, we should remember that all information is only worth as much as we can retrieve of it.