An Experiment with Bilingual Subject Headings

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During the long history of civilization, mankind has fought many battles with the curse of Babel, using various means, ranging from crude oppression and cultural genocide to idealistic Esperanto-type projects and the Bressand plan. The least artificial of these methods is probably the melting-pot phenomenon, a result of economic and cultural gravitational forces without the willful interference of any language group. New York and Brussels are just two eminent stages of this process.

Assimilation, however, is not always a one-way street. Not only is the dominant culture taking over many elements from the absorbed one but the minority group often regains its identity and begins its own struggle for survival.

This is what is happening right now in America, where it was least expected. Bilingual education successfully fights its way in minority areas, especially where Spanish and other ethnic populations live in dense groups.

The new upswing of bilingual aspirations had its precursors in written principles and legal acts. Among others, the Unesco report entitled 'The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education' (Unesco 1953: 711-712) stipulated that every effort should be made to provide education in the mother-tongue until as late a stage in education as possible, and that the second language should be approached through the mother-tongue. In 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Chinese-speaking students of San Francisco were being deprived of equal education because of the language barrier. Then, as a result of a court case brought by the Puerto Rican Defense Fund, bilingual education became mandatory for every non-English-speaking Hispanic student in New York City, beginning in September 1975.

Due to these resolutions, especially the mandatory bilingual schooling, more students with language difficulties enrol in colleges than ever.

It is well known that the student who enters college is confronted with a new notion of the educational process which he did not experience in primary and secondary schools, and that is the notion of research. The source of research programmes is usually the library, the place in a college where most curricula are basically established. And difficulties arise quite specially when it comes to periodical literature.

There are gamuts of pedagogical and psychological reactions between the librarian and the bilingual user which cannot be discussed within the limits of this paper. They involve the process of alienation and assimilation, behavioural patterns, etc., even the nightmare of English spelling. What became unconditionally evident in our library was the need for a bilingual subject-heading list in the periodical reading room for reference and control of daily events.

Our library is part of the Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York, which is a four-year liberal arts and sciences institution with two bilingual programmes. It has also students who are not enrolled in these programmes; nevertheless English is their second language. For all these library users we began to develop a model system for bilingual subject approach.

The principal aim of this project was the construction of a bilingual subject-heading list which would be placed in the periodical reading room on a rotary card file. The list would include about 6,000 entries in two languages. The name of the device will be SOTAR (from Subject Rotary File). It is anticipated that, after the Spanish SOTAR, Chinese, Italian, Greek and other SOTARs will be developed subsequently in other libraries, serving minority groups.

Before we settled down to work, we tried to consult already existent bilingual indexes. Surprisingly enough, we were not able to find any such instrument in Puerto Rico, mainland United States and Canada. Then we studied the national bibliographies of traditionally bilingual countries like Switzerland and Belgium and contacted the Dietrich Verlag concerning their multilingual indexing methods. None of these systems gave us strong bases for our particular project. Thus we began the work at our own discretion and judgement.

It was obvious from the beginning that the main problem of our heading list is simplification in general and the method of simplification in particular. A cumulative volume of the H. W. Wilson Company's Readers Guide to Periodical Literature carries 40,000-50,000 entries; the Social Sciences Index 18,000 entries. The elegant British Humani-
ties Index presents in its subject section 20,000 entries as an average. And we had to go down to 6,000.

In order to cut the number of entries after amalgamating the descriptors of leading general indexes, we set the following schedule:

1. Omit all personal and geographical names
2. Omit entries selectively
3. Weed out the unnecessary combined entries (for instance, there is no need to maintain entries like 'Wine industry', 'Wine making', 'Wine as a gift'. An approach entry 'Wine' seems to be quite sufficient. But 'Intelligence service' and 'Intelligence tests' must be kept in the roster, naturally).

When the final English subject-heading list is compiled and revised, the process of translation follows. Here it must be kept in mind not only that dictionary terms do not always cover library terms but also that there are three distinct Spanish groups in the United States alone with different language maintenance and language shift. In the case of the ever-changing kaleidoscopic periodical literature, use and misuse of certain terms might be crucial. We are depending on linguistic experts and ready Spanish 'encabezamientos', that is, entry lists, and we try to keep a balance between colloquial and literary usage.

At this stage we can achieve a further reduction of entries, namely:

4. Omit terms which are identical in meaning and spelling in both languages, especially words of Latin origin, like 'criminal-criminal', 'mental-mental', etc.
5. Omit terms which are identical in meaning and spelling up to the fifth letter. E.g., 'narcotic-narcotico', 'music-musica', 'artist-artista'.

It is obvious that numbers 4 and 5 need close scrutiny and individual judgement in every case. Five seems to be satisfactory as key number with option to higher number in certain instances. Spelling often caused disappointments when words of identical origin and meaning had to be duplicated because they did not stand the test of the five-letter rule. For instance 'psychology-psicologia', 'psychiatry-psiquiatria', 'machine-maquina', 'photo-foto', etc.

Meanwhile we also designate some cross-references with due caution and restriction. It was observed that excessive cross-referencing is just as disconcerting as inadequate cross-referencing for readers with language difficulties.

The final draft of the bilingual subject-heading list will be completed in both the Spanish-English and the English-Spanish versions. The latter is especially needed for further developments, changes and updating.

The whole project proceeds rather slowly. There are, too, many items which have to be judged individually. Nevertheless, we hope to finish the work by the end of the current academic year. When all is finished and typed on the cards of the rotary file, the SOTAR will be put on the consulting table of the Periodicals Reference Room.

We are going to call the attention of the teaching faculty to the device and we plan to distribute questionnaires for the comments of readers. We shall advise all parties concerned about the main phases of the simplification process (nos. 1-5) in order to make the reader aware of what he can expect from SOTAR.

It is assumed that the list will be used mostly in the first and second year of the college and that senior students will not need such auxiliary instruments any more. But the first years are decisive for alienation or assimilation, continuation or termination of efforts. This is the period when the high rate of drop-out students must be put under control.

We would be grateful for any suggestions which would promote the perfection of this pioneer project.

Specification for
Codes for the Representation of Names of Countries

This is the title of International Standard ISO 3166—1974 which has been adopted as the British Standard BS 5347 : 1976. It provides two-letter and three-letter alphabetic codes (either of which may be used at choice) for use in any application requiring the expression of entities in coded form. Indexers may also find them useful as abbreviations in carrying out their indexing work.

The Standard covers the names of all countries, dependencies, and other areas of geopolitical interest. An effort has been made to incorporate into this code system the best elements of existing widely used codes, while not being bound by any one of them.