



Liberating Knowledge at the Margins: Toward a Discursive-Transactional Research Paradigm in LIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an LIS research paradigm by which the transactional relationships between knowledge organization systems (KOS) and external scholarly discourses may be identified and examined. It considers subject headings as discursive acts (or Foucauldian “statements”) unto themselves—in terms of their materiality, rarity, exteriority, and accumulation—arising from such discourses, and which, through their usage in library catalogues and databases, produce their own discursive and non-discursive effects. It is argued that, since these statements lead through their existence and discovery (or absence and neglect) to the creation of further texts, then potentially oppressive discursive formations may result where marginalized knowledges are concerned. The paper aims to better understand these processes in scholarly discourses—and the role of libraries therein—by examining recent examples in the LIS literature regarding matters of race and gender, and which are suggestive of this emergent paradigm.

Keywords: *gender · genocide · Indigenous peoples · knowledge organization systems · Michel Foucault · paradigms · race · research methods*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article propose un nouveau paradigme en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information : la recherche discursive-transactionnelle, qui peut aider les chercheurs en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information à révéler les transactions entre les systèmes d'organisation des connaissances (SOC) et le raisonnement des autres disciplines, en particulier pour déterminer les processus d'asservissement du savoir. Il vise à théoriser la mesure dans laquelle les SOC dans les bibliothèques reflètent les discours dominants dans ces domaines d'étude externes et leurs contextes socioculturels, reproduisant ainsi le statu quo dans ces disciplines. Les chercheurs critiques en BSI ont longtemps jugé la partialité des vedettes-matières et des systèmes de classification; cependant, les effets discursifs, matériels et non discursifs que ces partialités peuvent avoir sur les universitaires et l'érudition dans toutes les disciplines et dans la durée demeurent mal compris. Pour combler cette lacune, le présent exposé adopte une perspective Foucauldienne sur les SOC afin de mieux comprendre les processus d'asservissement des connaissances dans ces discours. Les



vedettes-matières et la classification dans les bibliothèques sont perçues comme des « affirmations » foucaaldiennes dignes d'une analyse discursive : des « textes » rhétoriques intentionnels empreints de pouvoir et qui contribuent à la création d'autres affirmations ayant leurs propres effets. Le paradigme proposé est illustré par des références aux recherches antérieures de l'auteur.

Mots-clés : discours · génocide · Michel Foucault · paradigmes de recherche · peuples autochtones · sexe · systèmes d'organisation des connaissances

IT is often recognized in the LIS literature that much of the research and scholarship in the field is instrumental in nature, emphasizing pragmatic and practical applications to enhance institutional processes related to collections and services, such that it is “encased within [a] positivistic shell” (Martin n.d., 2). Accordingly, the range of paradigmatic approaches adopted in the field maintains a rather narrow focus on materials, users, retrieval systems, and usage (Hjørland 2000). This emphasis has drawn some criticism in the literature, where it is seen as theory-averse, insular, and rhetorical where it should be epistemological and critical, and for failing to account for the position of the institution of the library in power relations (Day 2010; Pawley 1998).

At the same time, critical LIS scholars have critiqued the forms of political and moral domination exercised through biased normative knowledge organization and retrieval systems, and by applying the ideas of such social theorists as Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, and John Rawls to the philosophical foundations of libraries (Nicholson and Seale 2018, 6–8). This literature has revealed among other things the extent to which certain forms of knowledge have been subjugated and marginalized by libraries’ use of largely unexamined colonial, Eurocentric, sexist, and heteronormative knowledge organization systems (KOS) that have at their foundation normative assumptions about the world (Berman 1971/1993; Drabinski 2013; Olson 2002).

While these numerous biases and their potential remedies have been discussed in a rich literature since the early 1970s, few LIS scholars have connected these biases to external discourses or sought to articulate a means by which to theorize about either their discursive origins or the discursive and non-discursive effects that these biased taxonomies and structures may have on users, scholars, and scholarship across disciplines and time. The present paper seeks to address this gap by proposing a methodology for examining the transactional relationships between knowledge organization systems and external scholarly discourses, and considering index terms and classifications as discursive acts unto themselves arising from these discourses but which produce their own distinct discursive and non-discursive effects. The

paper seeks to better understand discursive processes in scholarly discourses—and the role of libraries therein—and illustrates its approach by applying Foucault’s archaeological method (1972/2002) and examining recent literature featuring representative elements of this emergent paradigm.

Theory and Methods

In a Foucauldian sense, *discourses* are “systems of thought” or the “demarcation of a field of objects” that are maintained as “discursive practices” not necessarily tied to any particular discipline but that require normative acts of exclusions and selection (Foucault 1997, 11–12). By *transactionality* we are referring to the dialectical processes of knowledge production and reproduction in which libraries participate across all disciplines, and which through the publishing industry lead to further literary warrant justifying the knowledge organization systems they employ. Using a Foucauldian lens, it is argued below that discursive formations in libraries are more than metaphorical: in reflecting, reinforcing, and reproducing scholarly discourses, KOS not only have transactional relationships with discourses within given fields but have material and non-discursive effects on users as well. Because, as Foucault (1980, 81–82) observed, institutional discursive practices necessarily involve exclusions and constraints that can serve to subjugate forms of knowledge, library subject headings and classifications are therefore framed below as discursive acts (or Foucauldian “statements”) unto themselves, worthy of discourse analysis: intentional rhetorical “texts” tied to surrounding contexts, imbued with power and contributing to the creation of further statements with their own discursive and non-discursive (i.e., real-world) effects (Foucault 1972/2002).

Such investigation transcends both conventional and critical LIS research paradigms in that it situates the instrumentalities of KOS within the discourses of extrinsic disciplines or fields of study so as to understand the transactional relationships between them as well as their material effects. This mode of research, it is proposed, is best described as *discursive-transactional*, a distinct mode of inquiry that—it is argued—is particularly well suited to uncovering subjugated knowledges such as those concerning race, gender, sexuality, power, colonialism, and social justice.

To introduce the proposed discursive-transactional research paradigm, the paper first reviews the literature on LIS scholarship to establish its conventionally understood paradigms and the critiques of same, in order to determine where such a mode would be situated. These critiques are primarily drawn from the literature of critical librarianship, which concerns institutional and professional relationships with capitalism, structures of race and power, and ideologies such as neoliberalism

and white supremacy (Nicholson and Seale 2018). It situates the discursive practices of the library within the broader issue identified by Winkle-Wagner, Hinderliter Ortloff, and Hunter (2009):

Who does the research process represent and who is excluded? . . . In what ways does the tradition of academic research reinforce the status quo, protecting the center and working against the innovations that might come from the margins? (7)

For its analysis, the paper depends heavily on the Michel Foucault's archaeological method and his use of statements to map the evolution of discourses (1972/2002). It also adopts dialectical approaches as articulated by Bales (2015): that libraries and their associated processes must be understood as the interplay of continuously transforming and ever-evolving interrelationships between ideologically situated material entities over time.

By theorizing about—if not empirically measuring—the uses to which library materials are put and the ways in which their discovery may lead to the production and reproduction of certain discourses, we transcend a purely service-oriented view in which our scholarly interest in the usage of information ends at the circulation desk—after which individuals are free to do with it what they will—an orientation that McCabe (2001) criticizes as essentially libertarian in nature.

Even as this paper deliberately deviates from librarianship's "practicality imperative" in which "we are to be pragmatic, solution-oriented professionals" (Hudson 2017, 207), there are a few pragmatic justifications for this research. As a meta-discipline, LIS can afford the scholar a catholic perspective on research problems external to librarianship itself, one potentially liberated from internecine debates and disciplinary conventions that might constrain other scholars. As well, the very position of LIS near the margins of the academy affords the librarian scholar the institutional freedom to engage in scholarship that might otherwise be considered unconventional or even taboo. Using LIS theory, methods, and contexts to explore and liberate marginalized knowledges can at the same time reveal the role of librarianship in perpetuating that marginalization. Adopting a pragmatic view of knowledge assists us here in recognizing that knowledge claims should evolve according to their ability to meet human needs, that experts are fallible, and that documents should therefore not be organized according to schemes that presume totalizing, unchanging truth (Hjørland 2008a; 2008b).

The proposed paradigm is structured according to the Aristotelian trinity of *theoria* (thinking), *poiesis* (making) and *praxis* (doing), with special attention to the idea that the representation of knowledge constructs our sense of reality (Olson 1998). To illustrate the proposed model, the author considers four recent examples of LIS scholarship that take discursive approaches to oppression in knowledge organization

systems as they relate to conceptions of race and gender (Adler 2017; Doyle 2013; Fox 2015; Samuelsson 2010), before reflecting on his own work concerning the history of genocide against Indigenous peoples in the Americas—a topic of considerable controversy among historians (Dudley 2017). These works, it is proposed, are prototypical (if not fully realized) examples of the paradigm.

Limitations

Such a partially self-referential method is necessary because there are so few extant examples of transactive discourse analysis in the LIS literature. Indeed, as recently as 2015, Fox found that little research had been done in connecting library knowledge organization systems to underlying discourses (Fox 2015, 27).

Another important limitation to the present study is that because search results are not wholly in the librarian or cataloguer's hand, being influenced by algorithmic bias, relevancy ranking, and tools within vendor ecosystems (see for example Goldman 2008; 2011), KOS are only one of many potential sources of search-engine bias (Cleverly 2017) and so are beyond the scope of the analysis and not addressed here. It should also be stressed that since the analysis is oriented to explicating a mode of research concerning ideologically situated knowledge organization systems, rather than the biases in these systems *per se*, the literature review is focused on modes of research in LIS and their theoretical foundations; biases in KOS are addressed substantially elsewhere (e.g., Berman 1971/1993; Drabinski 2013; Olson 2002; Olson and Schlegl 1999).

It is hoped that the proposed discursive-transactional research paradigm can not only contribute to identifying subjugated knowledge in various disciplines and the role of knowledge organization in libraries as a factor in such subjugation, but also indicate a path to broader transdisciplinary applications of and approaches to LIS scholarship.

Literature Review: LIS Scholarship and Its Discontents

Despite the emergence in recent decades of a rich critical and theoretical literature in LIS exploring the location of information studies and libraries within systems of power and structural inequality (summarized in Nicholson and Seale 2017), it is widely recognized that scholarship in librarianship is for the most part normative, policy-oriented, pragmatic, and instrumental rather than addressing purely theoretical matters (McNicol and Nankivell 2003). As such, many of the definitions of and prescriptions for LIS scholarship tend towards the technocratic, self-flattering, and uncritically teleological, even tautological. For example, the British Association

for Information and Library Education and Research (BAILER) Heads of Schools and Departments Committee (1999) stated that the role of academic research in LIS is

to advance professional knowledge; to increase understanding of the information society; to underpin the development of the information society; to analyse the potential benefits for society; to enable practitioners to relate more effectively to the working environment; to provide practitioners with direction and guidance; to promote the progress of the profession. (in McNicol and Nankivell 2003, 13)

By this account, research is intended to advance progress in the profession without reference to the actual content and purpose of the profession. We see a similar lack of criticality in the reference to the “information society,” which is a presumed, monolithic, and unproblematic good with benefits to be analyzed and advanced by the profession, rather than a confluence of political, economic, and technological forces that might result in disadvantage, marginalization, or injustice. Meanwhile, library workers themselves are apparently devoid of agency such that they must be reconciled with and relate to the working environment rather than have any influence within it. They are to be directed and guided by research but in this context are not seen to contribute to it.

In her exhaustive meta-analysis of the international LIS literature over the 40-year period between 1970 and 2010, Gauchi Risso (2016) confirmed this instrumentality, determining that the field has been long dominated by a “professional paradigm,” in which descriptive studies are intended to inform practice. Concluding that this indicates a field with “poor scientific discipline development,” she called upon LIS to develop new methodologies (74–75).

Birger Hjørland, in his overview of the practice and theory of LIS (2000), integrates more theoretical approaches in his list of what he views as the most significant approaches in the scholarship: the physical and cognitive paradigms (the first has a focus on documents, databases, and other artefacts, the second on users and information intermediaries [Ellis 1992]); different system-oriented views; domain-analysis (scope of a knowledge domain and its thought/discourse communities); literature/document use approaches (including bibliometrics/informetrics); semiotic, hermeneutic, and related views; and combinations of the above (522). Hjørland describes a combination of descriptive and theoretical approaches to the study of documents and their use, information-retrieval technologies, information-seeking behaviour, and processes of information production and communication. It is noteworthy that the domain-analytic view he describes from his own work (Hjørland and Albrechtsen 1995) offers something of a broad sociological and functional context for the present discussion, in mapping out the “information structures and communication channels between producers,

intermediaries, and users of knowledge/information in discourse communities” (519), which, while revealing the venues in which Foucauldian statements may be made, is nonetheless intended to support instrumental goals related to information retrieval. Of further interest for our purposes is his foregrounding of agency on the part of users and members of discourse communities, and the essential role of LIS in the ability of both to recognize, retrieve, and communicate relevant information. This is a view shared by Fadaie (2012), who eschews a functional focus on the library as a document-collecting institution to instead examine the “information needs of humans” exercising their intentionality in relation to systems of knowledge organization—which are themselves the result of the intentionality on the part of information providers (119).

At the same time, such intentionality at the individual, professional, and institutional levels must also be recognized as historically and ideologically contingent: following Harris (1986), LIS researchers should avoid “ahistorical and deterministic” efforts to establish “general laws intended to apply to objects independent of their historical or cultural location” (523). Instead, the LIS scholar must address the institution’s and profession’s interrelationships with contemporaneous sociopolitical forces and entities—what cultural historian Carl Shorske calls the “fields of social totality” (Shorske in Harris 1986, 522). If, as Harris argued, librarianship is a “mediating profession concerned with knowledge derived from all other disciplines” (523), then interdisciplinary—or rather, transdisciplinary—approaches in LIS scholarship are essential.

With a willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries, or to carry perspectives from one discipline into another, comes the opportunity for the acquisition of new insights that can emerge only at the margins of one, both, or all fields involved (Arafat et al. 2014). At the same time, such insights may have difficulty finding acceptance in the respective disciplines, owing to the challenges they present to the dominant culture. As Winkle-Wagner, Hinderliter Ortloff, and Hunter (2009) argue,

The center or mainstream often defines the margins through boundaries that put up limits, define or exclude. . . . Marginality becomes defined as the not-normal, the not-mainstream, the not-center; invoking a deficit model on those people, ideas and so on that are marginalized while reaffirming the normalcy of the center. (3)

Citing W.E.B. DuBois’s notion of the “dual consciousness” held by blacks of the dominant white majority and of the nature and sources of their own oppression, they add that researchers on the margins are well aware of both the mainstream views and their own marginality in relation to it, while those adhering to orthodox views are generally aware only of the mainstream (4).

As we have seen, LIS scholarship is largely concerned with applied, pragmatic research that tends to reduce the focus of LIS to “the form and organization of information, its underlying structure, and only secondarily with its content” (Bates and Maack in Dali 2015, 483). This emphasis on the formal over the substantive or propositional brings with it an instrumental orientation to “the means of service delivery rather than their ends, that is, whether they are desirable or morally valuable” (Dick 1995, 226). Some critical LIS scholars locate this impetus in “neoliberal ideologies and corporate practices that foreground practicality and efficiency with little reflection or critique” (Nicholson and Seale 2018, 4–5). Hudson (2017), connecting such presumed normativity to the profession’s enduring whiteness adds,

Tacitly or explicitly, then, our hegemonic discourses of practicality are animated by a rough set of dualisms: practice is action, solutions, efficiency, the everyday, concreteness, reality; and theory is thinking, reflection, abstraction, problems, inapplicability, inefficiency. The theoretical is definitionally disconnected from reality. (210)

From a marxist perspective, the primary concerns of librarianship—the book and its indexing—have, as a consequence of this resolute instrumentality, been *fetishized* or viewed in isolation from their sociocultural and historical bases, such that they are mere matters of technical processes requiring no theoretical perspective; library work is thus seen almost entirely as practice only occasionally troubled by—or more accurately—contrasted with theory, rather than a *praxis* or the synthesis of both (Popowich 2018). To many critical LIS scholars, this inattention to theory has for more than a century produced a “politically naïve” and deliberately “innocent” profession oblivious to its own complicity in contemporary power relations (Pawley 1998, 132; Dick 1995, 230). Frohmann adds, “LIS theory is so extraordinarily unreflective about its institutional underpinnings to warrant the hypothesis that power’s invisibility is the consequence of a deliberate discursive strategy” (quoted in Buschman 2007, 25). This lack of attention extends to the discourses underlying its foundational knowledge-organizing structures: as Andersen and Skouvig (2006, 301) note,

[a]n awareness of society and its social and political structures and their materialization in recorded discourses does not appear to be a fully formed trait of the study of knowledge organization in LIS.

Pawley (1998) concludes that the library profession, in being self-celebratory in its rhetoric and descriptive in its research, is in fact “hegemony’s handmaid” (141).

It shall be argued below that a research methodology geared toward a de-fetishization of library materials and indexing may reveal how KOS marginalize knowledge with discursive effects throughout entire fields of study and non-discursive effects on scholars themselves. Such a methodology would assist the LIS researcher in mapping the mediating function of librarianship in terms of its

historical and ideological contingencies and subjectivities. For guidance in this enterprise we turn to the ideas of social theorist Michel Foucault.

Theory: Social Epistemology and the Archaeology of Knowledge

Broadly speaking, the proposed paradigm bears similarities to Egan and Shera's (1952) notion of *social epistemology* and the role of libraries in the "production, distribution and utilization of intellectual products," thereby "coordinating the knowledge of many different individuals" so that "society as a whole may transcend the knowledge of the individual" (13–14). Further developing their idea, Budd (2004) argues that the academic library in particular plays an essential role in social epistemology, but he questions whether this is in an active or passive capacity, and, if the former, to what extent the library "speaks" or generates truth claims (365).

However, what is being proposed below more explicitly adheres to Michel Foucault's archaeological approach to historiography as set out in his 1972 work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972/2002). While Foucault's ideas have been highly influential in LIS—in particular, those concerning power, discourses, and knowledge construction, as well as associated silences and exclusions as a result of such construction (Buschman 2007)—this book (along with *The Order of Things*, 1970)—has been cited less frequently in the LIS literature than his other works, and explored less thoroughly. Dewey (2016) attributes this phenomenon to a combination of scholars' reliance on secondary and tertiary sources to summarize Foucault's challenging and complex ideas and the use of one popular text—*Discipline and Punish*—to represent them, almost to the point where *Archaeology* is at risk of disappearing entirely from LIS scholarship (Dewey 2016). Blair (1987) also notes that, because Foucault himself moved on from archaeology to genealogy, commentators tend to consider the earlier method as "abandoned" (365). For our purposes, however, Foucault's articulation of the position of the "statement" in discursive formations as set out in *Archaeology* is ideally suited to the task of linking knowledge organization systems to discourses and their transformation through time.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972/2002) writes that the statement is the "elementary unit of discourse" (80) yet is not equivalent to, nor does it require the composition of, grammatically complete sentences but can consist of botanical tables, algebraic equations, or genealogical family trees. Statements, Foucault argues, are not to be read for hidden or symbolic meanings, as such analysis would require going beyond their material existence, construction, and contexts. Foucault is instead interested in the *rarity* of statements in terms of what they do not say, that in their mere existence they take the place of other statements that could have been made but were not. Foucault stresses that this does not presume a buried meaning or

suggest that we seek motives on the part of the writer/speaker to disguise or repress. Rather, this is only the simple recognition that not everything that *is* said is all that *could* be said. The statement's *exteriority* is the second consideration: its deployment and distribution in space and its resulting position among and proximity to other (equally rare) statements. Finally, we want to know the extent to which the statement *accumulates*, how it is used and repeated, or, as it turns out, rejected and abandoned.

These three characteristics presuppose further qualities: that statements exist (and accumulate) as the result of prevailing material and social conditions, practices, and techniques associated with institutions or informational modalities, which Foucault refers to as their *remanence*, forming the basis of the operations of memory. Within these conditions, statements are subject to *additivity*, or groupings of successive statements that will be unique to each modality, as well as *recurrence*—albeit transformed each time by the unique relations comprising all these elements (Foucault 1972/2002).

Therefore, the proposition that subject headings and classification assignments are statements is entirely consistent with his conceptualization; furthermore, that they lack discernable authors or subjectivities also accords well with Foucault's goal of focusing on the materiality of statements rather than on the intentions of particular writers or speakers or the outcomes of their utterances. As a Foucauldian statement, a subject heading exhibits rarity in that it was chosen over others, thereby implicitly indicating what is not said. A classification represents a similar act, eliminating other possibilities through alphanumeric uniqueness and associated descriptions. Subject headings and classifications also have an exteriority: they are utilized in relation to others, and with uniform subheadings and numerals that change their meaning. When juxtaposed with other statements and locations, definite and distinct discursive purposes are fulfilled; yet through additivity and recurrence these purposes are transformed. Finally, knowledge organization systems accumulate, or fail to do so: a subject heading such as "Indians of North America" dominates for decades yet may give way to more progressive alternatives such as "Indigenous peoples—Canada."

Subject headings and classifications are expressions of knowledge, power, and ethics: they express an authoritative position on other knowledge, and they do so from a privileged position. They presume a normative ethics on what is just, right, universal, standard, and desirable (Berman 1971/1993; Olson 2002). Viewing KOS in this way allows us to recognize them as acts with materiality and purpose. It's not that we're not concerned with "truth" *per se* when considering statements, but we are concerned with purpose, with the function of the statement as an act. Yet at the same time we also need to acknowledge some tension between Foucault's archaeology and

the present project, as he denies his intention to seek “out the origin of the ideas they contain or the influences of those ideas upon future thought or action” (Blair 1987, 9), whereas our interests lie in both directions.

As previously noted, Foucault’s archaeological project concerning discursive acts was not completed as such, as he would move on to formulate genealogical studies regarding how forms of power arise from social practices, making no distinction between the discursive and non-discursive (May 2006). Still, Foucault’s method of discourse analysis using statements as its foundation is of particular interest to LIS scholars because it directs our attention to the “conditions of [statements’] existence: the institutions that regulate their production, circulation, and relationships; and the kinds of social arrangements that contribute to their stability over time” and that imbue them with authoritative power (Frohmann 2001, 16). The materiality of Foucauldian statements as a consequence of processes of institutionalization means that they acquire authority so they can be reinscribed—that is, interpreted by others and integrated into further such statements that in turn do the same, thus contributing to a discursive formation. As Linstead (2001) puts it, a Foucauldian lens on a given discourse reveals how it

structure[s] the rules and procedures by which different forms of knowledge are determined. Further, it defines different fields of understanding as legitimate objects of that knowledge. . . . The discourse also determines criteria for the establishment of acceptable “truth” and the creation of “truth-effects,” and further delimits what can and cannot be said, the normal, the abnormal, the standard and the deviation and hierarchizes the field of these relations. (226)

According to Foucauldian LIS theorist Gary Radford, discursive formations are “entities to be seen, touched, and experienced because the objects that make them up, such as books, are material objects. It follows, then, that because discursive formations are material, they have material effects” (2003, 3). We should note that Radford is here referring to library classification schemes as a metaphor for understanding discursive formations. Elsewhere, however, he states,

institutions attempt to legitimate the current version of knowledge and truth by controlling the manner in which texts are ordered with respect to each other. . . . The library, as an institution for arranging texts, becomes a component in the legitimation of a particular order of discourse. . . . The production of commentaries, critiques, arguments, and debate becomes the act of validating or questioning [knowledge claims and their location] within the limits of the prevailing arrangement. (1992, 418–19)

It follows then that if the institutionalization of statements and texts leads to the creation of further texts, then discursive formations created by and within libraries through the arrangement and discoverability of texts means that these formations are more than just metaphorical: they are among the “material effects” in the creation

and delimitation of further discursive formations. In the words of philosopher Todd May (2006),

For Foucault . . . it is not that it is impossible to say certain things. The limitation is not a physical or a legal one. It is, rather, epistemic; that is, it has to do with knowledge. If certain unacceptable things are said, or if things are said that might be acceptable if uttered by the right authorities but not by this particular person, they will simply not be recognized. (38)

In identifying in this way a presumed universal “aboutness” regarding a document, the library recognizes certain authorities while foreclosing other systems of meaning, in the process delegitimizing such knowledge and alternative pathways of investigation. As Indigenous LIS scholar Ann Mary Doyle (2013) notes,

KOS function materially and symbolically as textbooks in the authority and influence they carry in transmitting official knowledge and in their prescriptive nature. . . . They reflect and reproduce dominant curricular structure and content, and operate as “required reading” in that it is necessary for users to absorb and replicate their structure and semantics in order to navigate them (form search strategies) and find resources in library collections. Indexers are similarly constrained by these strictures. KOS become embedded in educational infrastructure through both reflecting and mapping curricular content and once embedded in this way continue to shape future thought. (117–88)

Regarding the influence of cataloguing and classification rules, combined with conservative selection policies that overlook alternative or radical perspectives, Christine Pawley (1998) argues that “libraries and librarians play a largely unexamined part in processes of cultural production” (141). Doyle (2013, citing Wiegand) adds that by claiming “neutrality,” the profession of librarianship denies its political implications as well as the agency of its own practitioners in knowledge production (119). By adopting a Foucauldian perspective on the effects of traditional classification schemes and indexes, we can see that they tend to reproduce existing ideas and thoughts at the expense of others. The ideas, concepts, and foreclosed areas of research as a result of such hegemony Foucault (1980) referred to as *subjugated knowledge*, or

historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systemization. . . . By “subjugated knowledges” one should understand something else . . . namely a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or insufficiently elaborated; naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (81–82)

The effects of KOS in libraries may then be both discursive and non-discursive; yet these dimensions—both causal and consequential—are poorly understood in the LIS literature. Indeed, identifying and studying these phenomena are tasks for which conventional research methodologies in LIS aren’t quite suited. For these reasons, articulating a new research paradigm seems warranted.

Toward a Discursive-Transactional Research Paradigm in LIS

Our starting point for the *discursive-transactional research paradigm* is the proposition that the elements of KOS—that is, subject headings and classifications—are themselves discursive acts in their own right: historically and institutionally contingent “texts” with their own materiality and exterior, rhetorical configurations (e.g., associated/adjacent subject headings and classes), and which emerge from and influence other texts, producing both discursive and non-discursive effects. These effects include setting bounds on permissible expression through the use of normative bias in subject headings and classification, which may constrain researchers’ options and opportunities for discovery, influencing what ideas are available for incorporation into further discourses and thus “shap[ing] future thought” (Doyle 2013, 188). By thus representing knowledge, KOS construct realities, in a process of *poiesis* that is at once ontological, epistemological, and affective. As Olson (1998) observes,

In *poiesis*, we understand that the representation of reality is the construction of reality. The representation of information, through classification, is part of the construction of information. Classification remakes and alters information by constructing a particular context for it—gathering, scattering, and juxtaposing topics in relation to each other. (245)

Given the complex transactionality of the information environment thus conceived, a new paradigm of LIS research is required, one that would not only involve situating KOS within the relevant external academic discourses to which they pertain as well as the broader socio-cultural contexts of those discourses, but would also view these relationships as mutually reinforcing and generative transactions.

To illustrate the proposed use of statements in a context concerning matters of recognition, let us consider the book *The American West and the Nazi East* (Kakel 2013), which was also discussed at length in the author’s previous work (Dudley 2017). Kakel’s stated intention in this study is to compare, contrast, and draw parallels between the policies and actions of the government of the United States against its Indigenous population and those of Nazi Germany against Eastern Europeans; by considering the subject headings assigned to the book in WorldCat catalogue as statements, we can ask whether or not they accurately describe Kakel’s discursive act.

- Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945).
- World War (1939–1945).
- Indians of North America–Wars.
- Indians, Treatment of–United States.
- Massacres, West (U.S.)–History–19th century.

- World War, 1939–1945–Atrocities–Europe, Eastern.
- Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)–Europe, Eastern.
- Genocide–Europe, Eastern–History–20th century.
- Atrocities.
- Genocide.
- Indians, Treatment of.
- Massacres.
- Territorial expansion.
- United States–Territorial expansion.
- Germany–Territorial expansion.

In terms of the statements' rarity, we must understand from the outset the limited pre-existing range of the sayable: unlike informally structured speech acts or creative writing, these subject headings derive from a selection of established, formal headings that comprise hierarchies through standard subdivisions. While much *could* theoretically be said on these matters, only a handful of possible terms are, in reality, permitted when using the rules of the Library of Congress. Even so, we note what is *not* said: this book could quite conceivably have been assigned the subject "Indians of North America–Wars–Atrocities" to correspond with the heading concerning Eastern Europe. Equally, a hypothetical heading for "Poles–Treatment of" or "Jews–Treatment of" would correspond to that assigned to describe America's attacks on Native Americans. "Genocide" is acknowledged to have occurred in Eastern Europe, but there is no corresponding "Genocide–United States" heading.

The exteriority of these headings further reveals an initial structured equivalence: the name for the overall violence in each historical period is accorded two adjacent headings each in terms of their conflicts' names ("Holocaust, Jewish"; "World War, 1939–1945"; "Indians of North America–Wars") and the phenomena associated with them ("Indians, Treatment of"; "Massacres, West"; "World War, 1939–1945–Atrocities"). Yet, when we consider these statements' additivity and recurrence, a discursive positioning emerges: "Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)–Europe, Eastern" and "Genocide–Europe, Eastern–History–20th century" are grouped together with no corresponding adjacent terms relating to North America.

Similarly, toward the end of the list, "Atrocities" and "Genocide" as generic concepts are granted adjacency but without historical or geographic context, but are then followed immediately by "Indians, Treatment of" and "Massacres," as if these two factors are distinct phenomena from those that precede them. Finally, the United

States and Germany each pursued “Territorial expansion,” both of which, placed here on their own, are oddly de-racialized. The recurrence of the headings—the repetition of “Indians, Treatment of,” “Atrocities,” “Massacres,” and “Territorial Expansion”—lends ambiguity in terms of their potential discovery in the catalogue, as they are independent and free from specific historical associations.

Such a Foucauldian reading of these subject headings as statements reveals a discourse that—by design or no—does not hold as equivalent the genocides of Native Americans with genocide as committed by the Nazis. Despite the balanced interpretation sought by Kakel, the statements concerning his book’s “aboutness” obfuscate this. (As shall be discussed below, this discursive disparity between the mainstream acceptance of genocide having occurred in Europe and a corresponding ambivalence or rejection of such in the Americas is reproduced in the scholarship of genocide studies [Dudley 2017]).

With these principles and examples in hand, we may now turn to the task of setting out the proposed paradigm itself. A discursive-transactional research paradigm in LIS would consist of the following domains, organized according to Aristotle’s typology of human action:

Theoria (thinking): Describing and Situating Knowledge

- The socio-cultural, historical, and/or political contexts in which a particular dominant scholarly discourse exists
- The discourse itself: its ontological, epistemological, and/or methodological foundations
- The institutionalization of this discourse and how this works to exclude and subjugate other forms of knowledge
- The counter-knowledges subjugated by these forms of institutionalization, and the extent to which they constitute an insurrection against dominant narratives

Poiesis (making): Representing Knowledge

- The representation of both dominant and subjugated discourses in library knowledge organization systems
- An analysis of these representations as statements, in terms of the extent to which their rarity, exteriority, and accumulation reflect and reinforce dominant discourses
- The material, discursive, and non-discursive effects of these representations

Praxis (doing): Acting on Knowledge

- Approaches to knowledge organization systems that could synthesize and include both dominant and subjugated knowledges in their institutional and socio-cultural contexts
- Pathways to implementing these approaches

We see here the extent to which we depart from conventional LIS research paradigms: while the first two elements are consistent with domain analysis (Hjørland and Albrechtsen 1995), the usual instrumental concerns of libraries enter only at the fifth step, the representation of discourses in KOS. While this approach may be theory-intensive and transdisciplinary, it is at the same time pragmatic in its conjoined interests in evaluating truth claims and in the material effects of KOS on library usage and users. In short, *the discursive-transactional research paradigm explores the epistemological transactions between knowledge organization systems (KOS) and external discourses, by considering the former as rhetorical discursive acts unto themselves and which, even as they are influenced by such discourses, produce their own potentially marginalizing discursive effects as well as non-discursive effects on users.*

We now turn to consider some recent examples of existing scholarship (one of which is by the present author) that, it is suggested, are prototypical of the discursive-transactional paradigm and that hint at the potentialities of this mode of research.

Elements of Discursive-Transactional Research in the LIS Literature

What few examples approximating the discursive-transactional paradigm obtain in the LIS literature concentrate on matters of race and gender and fulfill the model only to varying degrees. Adler (2017), for example, considers the historical racist maltreatment of African Americans as subjects in multiple classification systems and disciplines, locating the origins of these concepts in contemporary white-supremacist interpretations of evolutionary thought, but she does not herself discuss or analyze such literature. Similarly, Samuelsson (2010) identifies and criticizes the inadequate representation of feminist discourses in Swedish subject heading and classification systems but does not delve into the discursive sources of these misrepresentations and silences or their effects on users.

More fully realized examples containing elements similar to the proposed paradigm include two doctoral dissertations, one regarding Indigenous knowledge organization, and the other, gender classifications. In her dissertation for the University of British Columbia, Ann Mary Doyle (2013) explores diverse discourses of Indigeneity as part of her project to establish a theoretical framework for an Indigenous knowledge organization system. Treating KOS as “text and as discursive

practice” (86), she critiques the formal, static, and positivist Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal classification systems for their inability to accurately describe Indigenous knowledge, which is heterogenous, diverse, contingent, and dynamic. The *theoria* portion of her analysis involves developing a modified form of domain analysis in combination with what Martin Nakata (2002) calls the *Cultural Interface* with Western knowledge, in order to explore the interrelationships between that and Indigenous knowledges, given that these epistemologies have been interacting with each other for more than five centuries, with the former having worked so relentlessly to dominate and assimilate the latter. In so doing she argues that “knowledge organization functions as a discourse that constructs subject positions and social relations, and has material consequences in the world” (241).

Her *poiesis* demonstrates the inability of Eurocentric and colonial KOS to represent Indigenous knowledge, owing to their inadequate, improper, inappropriate, or non-existent language, with a profound emphasis on the ability of Indigenous students to successfully research Indigenous-related topics. In qualitative interviews with Indigenous graduate students about their frustrating library research experiences using these systems, Doyle further identifies an

affective dimension [that] as an assault on individual and collective integrity . . . constitutes as much of a barrier to Indigenous learners and Indigenous education as poor usability of the library collections and library KOS. . . . If the knowledge organization systems used by a university library are offensive or derogatory from Indigenous perspectives, they may also contribute to an alien climate for learners, with associated impacts on identity, sense of belonging, the ways in which learners perceive themselves, and their histories. (Doyle 2013, 141)

As unfortunate as such effects on Indigenous learners are, Doyle stresses that the tragic consequences of colonial KOS are intergenerational in nature, affecting not only learners but, through the shaping of public opinion, having negative ripple effects on society. To prevent these effects, Doyle’s proposed *praxis* involves developing and implementing an Indigenous Knowledge Organization (IKO) system, integrating the epistemological, social, discursive, and technical dimensions of her domain analysis of Indigeneity at the Cultural Interface (Doyle 2013).

Melodie Fox, in her doctoral work at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (2015), uses a modified form of Foucault’s genealogy to examine the historically contingent epistemological foundations for conceptions of gender in the various iterations of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, with a focus on medical and legal literatures in three time periods: the late 19th century, the mid-20th century, and the 1970s. Recognizing the real-world (i.e., non-discursive) consequences borne by individuals who are “othered” by such systems, and that tools of knowledge organization—especially classifications—are premised on external

discourses, her study of the *theoria* of normative classifications in both the medical and legal professions and in libraries finds that these not only inform each other but also privilege the viewpoints of (mostly male) creators, which are imposed on others. In examining the *poiesis* of the DDC concerning representations of women as well as transgender and intersex individuals, she finds that multiple harmful misrepresentations can result: she notes that “women” as a category didn’t exist in the first version of DDC, while transgender and intersex individuals were not recognized as social groups but rather in terms of medical and psychological conditions. Theorizing about the transactions between these discourses, she writes,

The legal profession relies on the medical as a knowledge source, and the medical draws from the legal the notion of the administrative and moral aspects of maintaining gender binaries. Medical classification can deny people subjectivity, but physicians need to be able to serve all patients. Legal discourse has the most opportunity to erase by not recognizing rights and by actively resisting participation in the discourse. Bibliographic classificationists and classifiers have the most difficulty fighting the ontological existence of women, intersex or trans people, as the works have to go somewhere on a shelf, but ignoring problems, working around them, or attributing them to “imperfection” can provide cover. (242)

Her proposed *praxis* is to favour a subjective epistemology over positivism, in which classificationists seek pluralistic perspectives from knowing subjects (Fox 2015). While Fox’s approach comes quite close to articulating major elements of the present discursive-transactional paradigm, because her analysis and conclusions are focused on representations of gender she does not directly address the methodological novelty of her approach and its implications for LIS.

One of the author’s own previous publications is also suggestive. In Dudley (2017), it is argued that mainstream historiographic discourses in genocide studies regarding the history of population collapse in Indigenous North America are revealed as attempts to exclude, dismiss, disguise, or diminish claims of genocide made by critical and Indigenous historians, and that these processes are apparent in the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Classification assigned to books concerning this history. Consistent with the proposed paradigm, the paper establishes the *theoria* of genocide studies in terms of its historical contingencies and its major ontological, epistemological, and methodological discourses, arguing that these systematically overlook the reality of the Indigenous experience and that this discourse is stabilized in libraries through KOS. Definitions and classification of genocide tend to exclude Indigenous histories for a number of reasons:

The diverse causes, forces, agents, possible intentions and mechanisms involved in colonial encounters in North America—played out across vast geographies over 500 years with thousands of cultures and eight Euro-American governments—have often mediated

against inclusion in conventional classifications and definitions. Chief among these criteria is documented evidence of political intent to commit genocide, which was met in only a few circumstances. . . . Debate over the place of Indigenous genocide in the literature is made more controversial still by the reliance on prototype-based definitions, considering all historical and contemporary genocide through the lens of a single genocide—namely, the Jewish Holocaust. (Dudley 2017, 12)

The paper then considers the *poiesis* of this knowledge organization and the origins of the associated terminologies in the Library of Congress, demonstrating that these reproduce and reinforce the comforting colonial narratives through various combinations of seemingly benign-sounding subject headings such as “Indians of North America–Government relations.” It was determined that, of the 50 sample titles gathered for the study—all of which featured variations of the words *genocide* or *holocaust* in the title—59 percent included no relevant heading reflecting these concepts. As well, the Library of Congress call numbers assigned to these titles are diverse, scattering them across the E 51–99 range, denying the possibility of a browsable discursive formation. In the conclusion, the paper articulates its *praxis*: a process informed by Hjørland’s (2008b) pragmatism, describing such literature according to its knowledge claims—rather than according to an external positivist criteria—with KOS that explicitly acknowledge that genocide occurred in North America (Dudley 2017). Had the present author then combined this analysis with a Foucauldian archaeology of the subject headings of the examined titles—as was illustrated above with the selected book *The American West and the Nazi East* (Kakel 2013), as well as an empirical examination of their effects—then this paper would have been a true exemplar of the discursive-transactional paradigm.

The above overview of previous LIS scholarship regarding the ways in which KOS are seen to perpetuate discourses hostile to marginalized knowledge claims demonstrates the extent to which they are in varying degrees strongly suggestive of the discursive-transactional paradigm while not being true expressions of it: certainly, none of these papers fully articulate a Foucauldian analysis of the materiality of KOS as statements. Yet they do argue for the need to regard all attempts at knowledge organization—at least as regards the social realities, relationships, and histories of human beings—as necessarily fallible, contingent, context-dependent, value-laden, unstable, and fluid, requiring reference to pluralist, subjective epistemologies and counter-knowledges.

Discussion

Within all scholarly disciplines there are forms of contestation, debate, contradictions, and competing theories—as indeed there should be for any healthy discipline. It follows then that any effort on the part of librarianship to describe

these fields must engage with these discourses, but that this project must be a highly unstable one, warranting humility—and investigation. The proposed discursive-transactional paradigm aids the LIS scholar in revealing these transactions between our field and the discourses of every other, and the extent to which knowledge organization systems reflect and reproduce the dominant narratives in these external areas of study. When the terms and structures of KOS in libraries are viewed as Foucauldian statements and hence as discursive acts, with the structure, contexts, and authority to influence and generate further statements, the place of libraries within the domains and channels of discourse communities (Hjørland and Albrechtsen 1995) becomes more fully and critically realized.

The preceding analysis points to some general principles that can inform the development of the paradigm for use by LIS scholars, in that it is revealed to be

- **Interdisciplinary:** makes strong connections between both librarianship and LIS and other fields of study
- **Holistic:** connects libraries to knowledge production in the broader society
- **Critical:** adopts critical theoretically informed perspectives on library processes and practices
- **Substantive:** as opposed to so much purely instrumental research, regards library practices and processes in terms of ends, means, and outcomes
- **Ethical:** underlines the responsibilities that indexers, classificationists, and other library practitioners bear to their users and for the development of other disciplines
- **Pragmatic:** knowledge claims are viewed as fallible and subject to change according to their ability to meet human needs, not as universal and fixed (Hjørland 2008a; 2008b)
- **Dialectical:** libraries are viewed relationally with social and historical forces over time, with transactions that are ongoing and never complete (Bales 2015)

In this final regard, one can imagine a research agenda that extends backward and forward in time, recounting changes to KOS in relation to evolving discourses in various fields—much as we see in Fox (2015)—and their effects on researchers, as well as years from now, when both have changed even further. It is therefore a dynamic, evolving research agenda, replete with possibility for better understanding the value-laden origins of what were originally intended to be “universal” and “neutral” taxonomic tools. In mapping the congruence between KOS and dominant narratives, discursive-transactional research can contribute to a disruption of those narratives. As Martin (n.d.) puts it, “It is through jarring our familiar discourse formations that we can begin to reexamine subjects anew. We begin to see the limits of what questions can be asked and what answers can be found” (10).

Conclusion

As an emergent approach in LIS research, the proposed discursive-transactional paradigm addresses many of the criticisms identified in the literature: in rejecting any attempt at neutral instrumentality, it de-fetishizes materials and their indexing, explicitly connecting both to historical, temporal, and ideological contingencies and to “fields of social totality” (Shorske in Harris 1986, 522).

Future research directions in this area could emulate Doyle’s analysis (2013) of the phenomenological aspects of KOS, that is, how users researching marginalized knowledge areas experience and respond—both affectively and conatively—to headings and classifications and the effect these responses have on the efficacy of their own research. As relevancy rankings and algorithmic biases are also highly influential in generating search results, locating the many normative and discursive assumptions underlying their creation and use would also be of great interest.

While it is a research paradigm with admittedly very particular applications, where the LIS researcher has specific interests in the transactions between our discipline and others and in the recovery of marginalized knowledges, the discursive-transactional paradigm points the way to an expanded and exciting range of possibilities in LIS research, ones that can not only enrich our discipline but also open up and enhance scholarship in others.

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