

Poetry, Sort Of: My Experience Using Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Supplemental List of Seventh-day Adventist Subject Headings

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Abstract

The *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, for all its seeming comprehension, has not always been up to the task of covering Seventh-day Adventist subject matter better than the *Supplementary List of Subject Headings* published by the Loma Linda University Libraries as used by the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index*. More important, there has been, and continues to be, a need to coin new terms when necessary. To rely primarily on one source for assigning index terms, however comprehensive it might seem generally, is too inflexible a strategy to be realistic. Relying on both the LCSH and the SLSH is the preferred method of indexing Seventh-day Adventist periodical articles.

The Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index: A Short History

Change has been a constant with the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index (SDAPI)* since before I arrived as Editor on July 1, 1992. The *SDAPI* began as an annual printed volume divided into title, author, and subject indexes. For the subject index, index terms were taken from two sources: the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) and the *Supplemental List of Subject Heading for the Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index* (SLSH). This was a useful collection of subject headings taking the needs of the *SDAPI*'s core audience into consideration. At its

peak, that audience consisted of 242 subscribers—librarians at educational institutions, administrators, a few members of the clergy, and some non-Adventist academic subscribers.

The print version, discontinued in 1998, was superseded by a CD-ROM version that was in turn replaced with an online database in 2010. Since the outreach of the *SDAPI* was now broader than its original primarily Seventh-day Adventist audience, a decision was made to rely more heavily on LCSH rather than the SLSH.

The SLSH was from the beginning a “supplement to the *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress*” (Hilts & Holm, 1973, p. iii). The SLSH was seen as a source which would “supply terms used as subject headings which are more specific in the field of religion (or other areas) and for terms which are used with particular reference to denominational theology or peculiar to its nomenclature” (p. iii). While this may have been satisfactory for the print-era *SDAPI*, the *SDAPI* management felt that, with the broadening of the Index’s potential user base, it needed to rely more on LCSH wherever possible.

That was the intention. In practice, the LCSH has not always been up to the task of covering Seventh-day Adventist subject matter better than the *SLSH*.¹ More important, there has been, and continues to be, a need to coin new terms when necessary.

Literature Review

Across disciplines and communities of shared interests, the indexing of the published literatures is a foundational requirement for scholarship. Of particular relevance to this essay is the history of the American Theological Library Association database (ATLA). Proceedings on the early committee record the reasoning and decisions that launched the database as a response to a wide-felt need among seminary librarians (Newhall, 1948; Ostander, 1947). Writing several decades later, Schmit and Taylor provide an overview of the work of the indexers since the database has become a standard. They refer to the ATLA Thesaurus as “the most important tool we have for assigning subject headings” and the intentional effort the indexing team make to “keep up with developments in the field” (2004, p. 150). Sennema (2002) reports on another database with many affinities to the *SDAPI*: the *Christian Reformed Church Periodical Index*. Most of

¹ On the purpose of LCSH, Heyman points out:

Consider the fact that the Library of Congress is not the national library of the United States. It is the library of the US Congress. Therefore, LCSH terminology reflects the materials in the collections that support US lawmakers making laws – the collections of the Library of Congress – and their primary end-users (senators, state representatives, and congressional staff). (2018, p. 151)

his article focuses on the in-house development of a search engine. However, similar issues about the use of LCSH are discussed.

While many indexes have a long history,² some recent examples illustrate the ongoing perceived need. For example, Lee (2017) describes a project linking archaeologists in England. Ballmer and Poggiali (2019) offer as a case study the indexing of an alternative press art magazine from the 1970's. Hoffman (2016) reports on the *Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals* and the added value the Index brings to the field because it covers content not readily available through other search methods. And Kotze (2015) discusses the challenges and the strategic process followed by the *Index to South Africa Periodicals*. Trained indexers apply the controlled vocabulary to each of these databases.

With the emergence of the internet and the ubiquity of keyword searching, considerable research and reflection has been published on the distinctive value of controlled vocabularies and thesauri (Engerer, 2017; Heyman et al., 2015). Shu (2014) explores in depth the limitations of keyword searching in Chinese, and concludes, "Indexers must offer a service which addresses scholars' known requirements, but must also make full use of their own knowledge and expertise to produce the knowledge-processing tools that can inform and influence future research trends. This kind of intermediation is undoubtedly valuable, not to say indispensable" (p. 173).

Comprehensive discipline-focused thesauri continue to rate as the most effective tools for database construction and searching, even though the cost-effectiveness of doing so may need further justification (Clarke, 2016; Heyman, 2018). This is evidenced by the Taxonomy Warehouse, which lists over 620 such thesauri (<http://www.taxonomywarehouse.com>). Yet the questions of cost-effectiveness and user preferences has inspired considerable research and innovation into automatic methods of subject indexing (Biezunski, 2018; Golub, 2019; Kipp, 2011; Lee & Schleyer, 2012; Reilly et al., 2012; Vázquez et al., 2015).

A Species of Cataloging

The task of editing a periodical index is a species of cataloging. Cataloging is "the process of creating metadata representing information resources. Cataloging provides information such as creator names, titles, and subject terms that describe resources, typically through the creation of bibliographic records" ("Cataloging," 2020) Assigning subject headings has always been a key part of the process.

A searcher of online databases must keep terminological variations such as synonyms and polysemy in mind in order to make a search as comprehensive as

² Examples include the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) for education, the National Library of Medicine (MEDLINE) for biological sciences and medicine, and the Chemical Abstracting Service (CAS) for chemistry.

possible. This becomes especially evident when searching across multiple databases. In many disciplines, precise terminology reduces ambiguity for competent users. This accounts for why some databases that specialize in one subject area have become the go-to source for information in that field; examples include the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) for education, the National Library of Medicine (MEDLINE) for biological sciences and medicine, and the Chemical Abstracting Service (CAS) for chemistry. In these and similar examples, disciplinary jargon drives the indexing.

However, in the case of the *SDAPI*, the sources drive the indexing. The name denotes the sources indexed: periodicals published by, or affiliated with, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The *SDAPI* covers a much wider range of topics than the title might imply: from church administration to church design, from theological issues to personal finance, from archaeology to eschatology.

This is what makes indexing for the *SDAPI* a form of poetry. It seems intuitive to rely on one-to-one correlations between a word and the idea it represents, and a good deal of indexing is of just this type. Walker and Jaynes (1999) have best expressed this: “we want to look for concepts, but are forced to search for words” (p. 63). But there is an awareness that many times there are several synonyms from which to choose. For instance, when indexing for information on the chief person in charge of a church or congregation, one could select from “Priest,” “Parson,” “Minister,” and “Rabbi” without considering the actual LCSH term: **Clergy**.³ The search for a subject heading then becomes a search for Flaubert’s “*le mot juste*,” the one best term to use, one that bears the full weight of the concept and which will be recognizable to the index user looking for information. Indexing is the inverse of database searching: it involves analyzing a periodical article and reflecting on how to make the article accessible to a user from the user’s perspective. This puts the poetry in indexing, making it a socially creative as well as a technical exercise.⁴

³ In this article Library of Congress Subject Headings, entries from the *Supplementary List of Subject Headings*, and original heading created for the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index* appear in boldface.

⁴ Another source of creative expression as part of what may seem, to many, to be a tedious job is the art of the supplied title: crafting article titles where at best only a series name may exist. There have been several examples in Adventist periodical literature, such as the “Planet Keon” and “Tucker Barnes” comic strip series by Randy Fishell in *Guide*. The author’s favorite example of a supplied title, however, was for an entry in Molly Rankin’s “Leaves from a missionary’s diary” – a series of personal observations she published in the *Australasian Record* during her service as a missionary in Papua New Guinea until she repatriated in the wake of the country’s independence in 1975. One article for which a title had to be supplied was about Winston, the aging cat of the mission compound. There could be only one title for such an article: “[’and the Village Is Proud of Him in His Decline’: ’Old Deuteronomy’ by T. S. Eliot],” (Rankin, 1974).

Emily Wilson best encapsulated the idea in her review of Mark Polizzotti's *Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto*: "Polizzotti['s] ... sympathies throughout the book are with translators and theorists who, like Jerome against Augustine, or Ezra Pound against Vladimir Nabokov, spoke of the need to translate 'sense for sense,' not 'word for word'" (2018, p. 46).

It is this "sense for sense" analysis that elevates the indexer's task above and beyond a symbol-crunching automated machine.

A Subject Heading Is Born

It might seem a simple enough procedure to read an article, understand what the article is about, and then plug in an appropriate subject heading. In doing much of this, however, it becomes evident that the task is far more nuanced than that. For this reason, out of necessity, the SLSH came into being. Even that proved insufficient at times, and it became necessary to use subject headings that existed in neither the LCSH nor in the SLSH. This might feel anarchic, but it is, in the words of Lois Mai Chan, part of the process:

As knowledge grows, new subjects—for which no adequate subject headings yet exist—are constantly emerging. Therefore, any topic encountered in cataloging but not yet represented in LCSH may be proposed as a new subject heading so long as it represents a "discrete, identifiable concept." (2005, p. 153)

One of the first subject headings coined for the *SDAPI* was **Child preachers**. I needed to index several articles about children preaching sermons in Malawi and Mexico, in China and Cairo. Ellen G. White attests to this practice in *The Great Controversy*:

In Scandinavia also the advent message was proclaimed, and a widespread interest was kindled. Many were roused from their careless security to confess and forsake their sins, and seek pardon in the name of Christ. But the clergy of the state church opposed the movement, and through their influence some who preached the message were thrown into prison. In many places where the preachers of the Lord's soon coming were thus silenced, God was pleased to send the message, in a miraculous manner, through little children. As they were under age, the law of the state could not restrain them, and they were permitted to speak unmolested. (1911/1950, p. 366)

I found, however, no appropriate term in LCSH for this phenomenon; the closest might have been **Children in public worship**, but that is too broad. The term is useful when describing children taking part in church services, but it misses the key role of children delivering the sermon. So **Child preachers** came into use in the *SDAPI*.

To cite more recent examples, David Robinson's article, "Blinkers," in the April 7, 2018, issue of *Guide*, dealt with the use of blinkers when training horses by limiting their field of vision and reducing distractions. Because the term was used for the article title, it couldn't be ignored. A Google search of the term turned up an article on "Blinkers (Horse Tack)" in Wikipedia. This seemed to be the perfect term, complete with its own parenthetical disambiguation; conceivably "blinkers" could be thought by some to be a kind of light bulb. So **Blinkers (Horse tack)** became a subject heading.

An article in the November-December 2019 issue of the *Lake Union Herald*, entitled "The Core," was about developing the muscles of the lower abdomen, referred to as core muscles. Since the term "Core (Anatomy)" or "Core muscles" has yet to be listed in the LCSH and the keyword "core" is far too ambiguous, the closest headings the *SDAPI* could use from the LCSH were **Torso—Anatomy** and **Torso—Muscles**, along with **Posture** and **Exercise**.

Some SLSH headings were revised early on either because they had not kept up with the English language or were just plain awkward. One of the first revisions done for the *SDAPI* in 1992 was to update the subject heading **Marihuana** to the more contemporary spelling **Marijuana**. The former spelling had been a valid subject heading according to the MARC record for **Marijuana**, but the latter had eventually become the standard.

In terms of awkward subject headings, the SLSH featured the subject headings **Beast of Revelation 13 (the one with 7 heads and 10 horns)** and **Beast of Revelation 13 (two-horned)**. These two subject headings clearly needed editing, so they were changed to **Beast with two horns (Revelation 13)** and **Beast with ten horns (Revelation 13)**. These proved specific enough because of Adventism's grounding in the detailed understanding of the prophecies in Revelation.

Grace Holm, in the SLSH, also acknowledged Adventist jargon, which many users of the *SDAPI* would take for granted. Some may be easily translatable, which others may be impossible, so that the LCSH does not accommodate what the writer intended.

The couplet "revival and reformation" is a paradigmatic example. Though use of the phrase has recently exploded in the Adventist press during the first decade of the 21st century, it seems to have originated with an article by Ellen G. White: "The Need of a Revival and a Reformation," which first appeared in the February 25, 1902, issue of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. Since then the

phrase has been used by Adventists and denominational critics alike, with a common understanding as to its general meaning.

When it comes to the LCSH, though, two prior headings have monopolized the terms. **Revivals** is a well-established subject heading, a subset of **Evangelistic work**. As for **Reformation**, it is a term reserved for the history of Protestantism in Europe, from Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses in 1517 to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years' War. As a result, neither of those headings captures the intent. Instead, the LCSH term **Church renewal** is to be preferred as a subject heading instead of the alliterative alternative. The words were sacrificed in favor of the concept.

The term "Adventurers" outside the Adventist context would seem innocuous enough. However, it is the name of the church-run children's "ministry open to all children ages 6-9" (Neufeld & Mansell, 1996). A check of the LCSH turned up the term **Adventure and adventurers**. The overlap and the possibility of confusion was just enough to disqualify it for use in the *Index*. Instead, the heading was replaced by **Adventurer clubs** just as Pathfinders became **Pathfinder clubs**. Note that the initial users of the *SDAPI* were within the denomination and would not have had any problem recognizing the difference between Pathfinder clubs and Adventurer clubs anyway.⁵

Logic and Ana-logic

While the process of indexing is at first glance an exercise in thinking logically, it is at the same time an exercise in thinking analogically, of seeking analogous terms, what Walker and Jaynes identified as the "concept." This is an option that is available to catalogers and indexers who use the LCSH and who need to stretch a subject heading to cover a different topic: "If the proposed heading is analogous to an existing heading or a pattern, the existing pattern or heading may be cited as one of the authorities on which the proposed heading is based" (Chan, 2005, p. 154).

This explains the creation of **Church and community**, a subject heading which is not a Library of Congress subject heading, nor did it occur in the SLSH. But it is analogous to the LCSH's **Hospital and community**. Owing to the nature of the *SDAPI*, which indexes Conference and Division periodicals that regularly

⁵ By the same token, it was assumed that most of the users would have had access to the *Seventh-day Adventist Directory of Churches in North America*. Wishing to hold down the size of the annual volume of the *Index*, the bulk of the church names which appeared in the *Index* were severely abbreviated: e.g., "Oak Grove Heights SDA Church (Missouri)". With the space constraints no longer a factor in the online *Index*, they are now being entered to conform to Resource Description and Access standards: e.g., "Oak Grove Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church (Rogersville, Mo.)."

report on church activities taking part in and aimed at benefitting the local community, **Church and community** is heavily used in the *Index* and is especially helpful when subdivided geographically. Used without a geographic subdivision, it describes articles concerning church outreach to the community in general. As the *SDAPI* was from the beginning a stand-alone publication, there was little concern about vetting an analogous term; it was there to be used.

Examples of Disconnect

Moving from the analogous to the ambiguous, the LCSH can sometimes be of no help at all. An example of this is with the terminological trinity of “Historicism,” “Preterism,” and “Futurism” where the terms are used to denote schools of thought when interpreting the apocalyptic books of the Bible. **Historicism** seems as if it should have a straightforward enough meaning: “a method of interpretation of Biblical prophecies which associates symbols with historical persons, nations or events” (“Historicism,” 2020). With this understanding, the term is used as a subject heading in the *SDAPI*. Even so, the scope note for **Historicism** in the LCSH appears to have broken loose from any theological moorings and the heading is a subheading of **Philosophy--History**: “Here are entered works on the theory that all sociocultural phenomena are historically determined, that all truths are relative, that there are no absolute values, and that the student of the past must enter into the mind and attitudes of past periods and avoid intrusion of his own standards.”

While **Preterism** does appear in the LCSH, the user is instructed to use **Realized eschatology** instead. A brief explanation of Preterism is as follows:

The word “preterist” is from the Latin “ire” (to go) and prae (before), i.e., *to go before*; the past participle is “praeteritus,” from which we get the English word *preterist – has gone past*. The Latin Vulgate uses the future tense of this word in Matt. 24:34: “*non praeteribit haec generatio donec omnia haec fiant*” (“this generation will not pass away until all these things be fulfilled”). Use of the term *praeteribit* in Jesus’ Olivet Discourse makes the name “preterist” particularly appropriate, since Preterists take the view that Jesus’ prophecies, as well as those of Daniel, Revelation, Thessalonians, and the rest, were all fulfilled within the generation of the first disciples. (Simmons, n.d.)

Thus, Adventist theologians might want to consider changing their vocabulary and substituting **Fulfilled** or **Realized eschatology** in place of Preterism. They would then be able to count on the LCSH to find pertinent sources.

As for **Futurism**, the problem is an abundance of unrelated applications. The name has been applied to intellectual movements in Art, Architecture, Literature, and Music, and the LCSH has appropriate parenthetical additions for each one: e.g. **Futurism (Architecture)**. There is no such addition, however, for Christian Theology in general or Eschatology in particular. Within the *SDAPI*, users can find some results by using “futurism” as a keyword search because the term has been used in some article titles.

In the end, the *SDAPI* adopted the encompassing LCSH subject heading **Apocalyptic literature—Criticism, interpretation, etc.** for articles engaging in the preterist—historicist—futurist hermeneutic conversation. In principle, while relying on the LCSH as much as possible might seem to serve a broader user base, there are significant disconnects.

Another term central to an understanding of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is “Latter rain,” the bestowing of the Holy Spirit on the people of God prior to the Second Advent. In the *SDAPI*, this came into use by way of the SLSH because there is no LCSH for the Latter Rain. There is, however, an LCSH listing for **Latter Rain movement**, which instructs the reader to use **Pentecostalism**. If the SLSH had not created this subject heading, an indexer would either have to relegate “Latter rain” to keyword searching or rely on LCSH terms close to the meaning, though missing the contextual implications: **Holy Spirit; Gifts, Spiritual; Eschatology—Seventh-day Adventists**; and for definitional purposes, perhaps even a link to **Agriculture in the Bible** to understand the meteorological metaphor.

Examples of what Works

While there are examples of disconnect, overall, the LCSH brings much to the task of indexing Seventh-day Adventist periodicals. The vast majority of LC subject headings are valid and useful, even if they seem odd at first glance. Such is the case with **God—Knowableness**. This is another *SDAPI* workhorse when it comes to indexing articles concerning the human capacity to know God’s character or will. That said, the term “knowableness” seems highly unlikely as a common intuitive search term.

Then there are those workhorses that have since been discontinued. Such was the case with the term **Literature evangelists and evangelism**, which has had a history nearly as long as that of the denomination itself. This is in the process of being supplanted in the *SDAPI* by the Library of Congress term: **Religious literature—Distribution**.⁶

⁶ The term had been **Religious literature—Publication and distribution** until 2003, according to the MARC record.

And the Word is Key

A necessary supplement to searching the *SDAPI* by subject headings is keyword or natural language searching of the database metadata. In a limited database such as the *SDAPI*, keyword searching of metadata may be more effective when dealing with the available scholarly publications. It's within the nature of these types of publication because articles tend to have explicit titles and/or subtitles that make clear the subject of the work.

Since the periodicals included in the *SDAPI* cover a broad range of subjects in a wide range of styles from general to scholarly, there is no guarantee that the title of an article will give any indication as to what it's about. In the *SDAPI* there are three articles with the title "Excuses, Excuses." While one of them has to do with excuses made by those asked to serve as church officers, the others deal with the role of motivation in the life of an athlete with disabilities and with the application of creative ability in church work and public worship (Fairfax, 2019; Perrino, 2016; Totenhofer, 1988). None of these can be deduced from a keyword search. So, while a comprehensive search of the database may begin with keywords, these serve best as a tool to finding pertinent controlled-language terms.

This can be contrasted with the *Adventist Digital Library*, a repository of Seventh-day Adventist archival material. Because of the vast number of items, it was not economically feasible to expect thorough indexing using controlled language. Additionally, periodicals are represented at the issue level, not the article level. By necessity, the database relies on full text searching in many ways similar to internet search engines. As such, search results are largely dependent on the precision of the search terms. Even with the best of terms, searching tends to bring high-recall low-precision results (Gross et al., 2015).

Conclusion

So where does this leave the *SDAPI*? Should we continue to place emphasis on LCSH, or continue to supplement it with SLSH subject headings, or work toward full-text searching? The short answer is: "Yes."

For all its apparent comprehensiveness, the LCSH simply does not contain every possible subject heading needed by the *SDAPI* on the *SDAPI*'s terms. The case of the Historicist / Preterist / Futurist schools of apocalyptic interpretation attests to that. As this article was being revised, the October 2019 issue of the *Pacific Union Recorder* arrived with the lead article focusing on the importance of reverence. Unfortunately, nowhere in the LCSH does the word "reverence" appear. For the *Index*, the editorial decision was made to use confirmed Library of Congress terms such as **Piety, God—Worship and love**, and **Glory of God** and hope that the user thinks to do a keyword search on "Reverence."

Yet keyword searching shouldn't be considered as a primary search strategy when dealing with periodical literature. It would be ideal if periodical article titles were as concise and explicit as the titles and subtitles of articles appearing in scholarly journals, where the articles and abstracts intentionally use the strongest keywords in their description. Of the 50 or so periodical titles that are indexed in the *SDAPI*, however, only about a dozen are scholarly publications where the title uses explicit language to give the reader an understanding of the content of the article. The more general in scope the publication, the less likely the title will obviously correspond to the content.

Even if descriptive language was conventional for general periodical article titles, there must still be room in the *SDAPI* to support neologisms and analogical terms that have yet to enter the LCSH, but which can serve the *Index* well now. In the LCSH, for example, the subject heading **Parkour** only came into use in 2008; if it had not, the user/indexer would have had to settle for the broader term **Extreme sports**.

As shown and as anticipated by Adventist librarians, the SLSH was designed to fill the gap between the LCSH and the periodical work at hand. As Grace Holm acknowledged: "This supplement makes no profession of being complete or exhaustive but has been compiled from the [1957] edition with changes and additions which I have found *necessary* [emphasis added] in indexing our Seventh-day Adventist periodicals" (Hilts & Holm, 1973, p. iv).

As with any branch of science (in this case, library and information science), we cannot know what lies before us. To rely primarily, if not exclusively, on one source for assigning index terms, however comprehensive it might seem generally, is too inflexible a strategy to be realistic. For the foreseeable future, it should be accepted practice to consult the LCSH *and* the SLSH when it comes to indexing Seventh-day Adventist periodical literature, while also exercising the freedom to create new subject headings as necessary within the guidelines set down in *Library of Congress Subject Headings: Principles and Applications* (Chan, 2005).

However, this freedom, essential to indexing, does impact potential users of the database. Most standard databases, such as the Atla Religion Database and the ProQuest Religion Database, feature a continuously updated user-accessible thesaurus. The *SDAPI* should perhaps consider adding such a thesaurus when it is feasible.

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