

Éléments de langage EDUG

Ouverture Emmanuelle

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to the 2017 symposium of the European Dewey User Group.

I am very proud that the BnF is hosting this event, of major importance among the european library community, and I wanted to share with you some thoughts on why it matters so much for us.

To start on a light note, 2017 is an anniversary for the Dewey classification in France, and not just any anniversary : the 100th anniversary of the use of Dewey in France. It was in 1917, when the US soldiers arrived in France during the war, with their libraries organised following this classification, that we started experimenting with Dewey in French libraries.

But actually, its widespread use is not so old in our country. It's only in 1978, when Annie Bethery published her summary (Annie Bethery who sadly passed away not so long ago), it's only in 1978 that the Dewey started its journey in French Libraries.

And since then, the classification has known a tremendous success. It is one of the most used in France, both in Research and Academic Libraries and in Public Libraries.

Of course, the BnF is also a user of Dewey and that's a story worth telling. It's when we opened the building where you are today, in 1994, that we felt the need to step away from our several hundred years old internal classification system, invented in the 17th century by Nicolas Clément, a system that is still in use as call number for ancient material. We decided to adopt Dewey as our classification system for the books that are freely accessible in the reading rooms. Then, in 2001, we also extended the use of Dewey to the national bibliography for legal deposit material.

However, BnF has a rather ambiguous relationship to Dewey. On the one hand, Dewey is treated as a first class citizen among our data, with its own authority file currently holding 145 thousand authority records, all available through our catalogue. On the other hand, the status of Dewey with respect to other indexing languages, such as RAMEAU, our subject headings vocabulary, is not always obvious to our cataloguers. Furthermore, for copyright reasons, the Dewey authority file is the only one at the BnF that isn't available as open data via our semantic web service, data.bnf.fr.

As a consequence, inviting you, the European Dewey user group, at the BnF is also a mean for us to give more visibility, even internally, to our engagement within the Dewey users community.

In France, we are currently launching or pursuing major national initiatives such as the Bibliographic Transition, the project of a national shared authority file (or entity file), and a renovation of RAMEAU, it is on our agenda to define the rightful place that the the Dewey should hold in the ecosystem of library data.

The Dewey classification itself is faced with many challenges, at the international level : the evolution of users needs, of cataloguing practices, of standards and systems. It has for itself several assets : being language independant, covering all domains of culture and knowledge, being very structured - and thus fit for an evolution towards a new environment for the web of data even when most vocabularies will most likely downgrade to mere tags or descriptors. But such an evolution would mean we have to take into account the transition of library data towards entity-based models, thus requiring major changes in the use and maybe even the conception of the Dewey.

Well aware of these challenges, the BnF is ready to engage in the work being carried out on these matters, notably within IFLA. As it has always been the case, EDUG, as a community, will be instrumental in walking towards these perspectives. Sharing tools, comparing uses, translating standards, promoting the Dewey have been the goals of the Edug group since many years. It has provided us with a framework where we can face the interoperability challenges that await our classification system for the future and advertise the continuous need for the use of a decimal indexing language. It has a been a forum for discussion between us, national libraries, public and university libraries, and with OCLC. Edug's annual gathering has set itself, since 2007, as a major place for european users of the Dewey to meet, exchange their feedback and build the future.

For all these reasons, it means so much for us that the BnF is standing alongside with the european community of Dewey users, today. I wish you a very fruitful day of work and again welcome to the BnF. Enjoy your conference !