

Cultural Frames of Ethics, a Challenge for Information and Knowledge Organization

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Abstract

Purpose/Thesis: Culture is the common frame that can embrace the other facets like social and political aspects of classification that are at play when we talk about ethical dimensions. This article explores the cultural frames of ethics by identifying fundamental characteristic of biases of KOSs, namely classifications and indexing languages as variants of KOSs. These biases are examined through the lenses of ethics. The main focus is on structural biases generated by mainstream classification and indexing schemes. Conceptual issues, some examples of cultural and racial biases and some directions for future work are discussed.

Approach/Methods: Based on a literature review of methods used in detecting biases, two indexing languages are chosen: subject authority file RAMEAU and LCSH. To show how knowledge organization systems contribute to marginalization, exclusion and stigmatization of a category of the population, and/or of a culture with reference to the French context a comparison between RAMEAU and LCSH was conducted.

Results and conclusions: In order to deal effectively with the ethical issues they face, library professionals and institutions providing knowledge must have a good working knowledge of information ethics.

Originality/Value: The author defines the cultural frame of ethics and demonstrates that a bias is hard to shift. The research conducted by the author and her students to verify the range of biases in RAMEAU showed that the efforts made to fight biases in KOSs brought positive results when it comes to LCSH, but it showed that the other systems based on this indexing language have maintained their initial biases. The author calls for solid and sustainable actions to fight against KOSs inherited persistent biases.

Keywords

Biases in knowledge organization systems. Cultural frames of ethics. Information ethics.

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1. Context and rationale

The main objective of this article is to clarify the two dimensions of the term *ethics* as it is used in the discipline of Library and Information Science. Experience showed that authors who write on information ethics deal mainly with the impact of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and of the Internet on information flows with only several studies devoted to the cultural, social and linguistic dimensions of ethics in information and knowledge organization (e.g. Guimares et al., 2016; Guitierrez, 2002; Mustafa El Hadi, 2017; Smiraglia, 2012; Tennis, 2012; Tran, 2018a; 2018b). I will first give a critical review

of the use of the term “ethics,” its coverage and its scope, and clarify the main focus of my examination.

The concept of ethics has two dimensions in library and information science: the first is related to the transfer to a largely digital information environment. It is more related to the explosion of ICT and the Internet access. We can mention, for instance, the use of computerized issuing systems, or the availability of many resources in digital form. In this respect, the main areas of concern within information ethics, as Bawden and Robinson (2013, 237) pointed out, include the contradiction between censorship and intellectual freedom; privacy, confidentiality and data protection; ownership of information and the possible commercial use of public information; universal access, information poverty and the digital divide; respect for intellectual property combined with fair use; and issues of balance and bias in information provision, collection development and metadata creation. In relation to library and information science, these ethical issues have been identified and typically grouped under the term of “information ethics” by Floridi (2013). This concept has been initially developed in the study of the activities of librarians and information specialists to cover a wider concern for information in society as a whole, for which information specialists obviously feel a particular responsibility. These concerns are accounted for by laws such as copyright and censorship rules and regulations, while others are covered by professional codes of conduct.

The second dimension, which will be at the core of my study, concerns ethics of knowledge organization (KO) as an intimate process linked to language and culture. I will therefore examine ethics within its cultural, linguistic and social frames. Most of the literature on KO focuses on the functionality of knowledge organization systems (KOSs). This functionality is related to the structure and the semantics of the KOSs. Our interest in ethics in KO is rooted in the early criticisms of classification systems. Major part of the criticism focused on the fact that these systems do not offer a representation of language and that their structure alters our interpretation of language in a way that is superfluous or false. For this reason, we must take into account the weight of cultures and languages in the design of KOSs as suggested by Tennis (2013; 2015).

We have titled my paper “Cultural Frames of Ethics” because culture is the common frame that encompassing social and political aspects of classification that are at play when we talk about ethical dimensions. All human activity takes place in definable social domains in which people share customs, habits, language, and therefore also perceptions. Perception shapes our comprehension of what we know, i.e. how we know what we know (Smiraglia, 2012). Perception is shaped by culture.

My study explores the cultural frame of ethics by identifying the fundamental characteristic of biases of KOSs, namely classifications and indexing languages as types of KOSs. These biases are examined through the lenses of ethics. I will mainly address conceptual issues, give examples of cultural biases and directions for future work I am conducting with my team at GERiCO with Master’s and PhD students.

Culture is an unwritten set of common values, norms, beliefs, and ideas shared by members of the same group (Daft, 2010), and as such it is considered as a social phenomenon. Hofstede et al. (2010) describe culture as a collective programming of the society’s thought system which distinguishes humans from other populations; in more general terms it is a relatively permanent system of meanings, shared by a group of people living in a particular geographic area during the same time period.

In KO, the concept of culture is essential, given its impact on classifications and indexing languages. Beghtol (2002) argued that culture describes in general the various phenomena that make up the collective beliefs and activities of a certain group of people. Discussions of culture refer generally to shared values, history, language, collective memory, social attitudes, preferences and practices. Authors such as Hope Olson (1996a; 1996b; 1999; 2000; 2002), examined classifications and indexing languages, and concluded that classification research needs to be more aware of the cultural construction of classification schemes and to find approaches which do not rely on fundamental universal principles of classification. In her paper, Olson (1999) described and discussed the main reasons for biases in classification in terms of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and other facets.

1.1. The relationship between culture, classification and ethical perception

Cultures produce different ethical frames and on the basis of creation, different ethical perceptions of culture create different values. Ethical perception has a crucial role in the decision making process. Classification is a mapping of information in a library and information studies context. It is one among many social classifications that construct people's everyday realities. As Olson observed, the problems of one-size-fits-all subject access schemes pit users' interest against literary warrant and both against the quest for objectivity unless it is possible to believe that readers and authors have identical conceptions so knowledge and these conceptions are objective. It is no wonder then that standardized classifications, widely used for the sake of economy are seen to create fences around concepts and around people who identify with those concepts. Early comments in this vein made by Olson (1999, 108) showed that not only the content, but also the fundamental principles of Western classifications reflect a particular culture and that cultures may find these principles negating their identities.

The problem of cultural specificity becomes increasingly significant as standardized classifications are used ever more widely. DCC is translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Greek, Hebrew, Icelandic, Italian, Korean, Persian, Spanish, and Turkish. Classifications produced by the mainstream cultures are biased in many ways, where they should not be biased at all.

2. Ethics in information science

In library and information science, ethics is framed by the philosophy of information, a domain which investigates the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its ethical consequences (Floridi, 2011). It is based on two simple ideas that information is something as fundamental and significant as knowledge, being, validity, truth, meaning, mind, or good and evil, and so equally worthy of autonomous, philosophical investigation. Floridi (2011) considers it to be a branch of the philosophy of information that investigates, in a broad sense, the ethical impact of ICTs on human life and society.

2.1. Historical note

It is crucial to summarize the evolution of the term “information ethics” (IE) in information science and to show how it is gaining momentum as ICTs develop and grow. The definition of ethics as a reflection on morality is widely accepted among philosophers beginning with Aristotle, the founder of ethics as an academic discipline. As Rafael Capurro (2007, 21), the head of the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), reminds us:

As a self-referential process ethics is an unending quest on explicit and implicit use of the moral code, that is to say of respect or disrespect, with regard to individual and social communication. In other words, ethics observes the ways we communicate with each other as moral persons and the ways this moral identity is understood. There is, indeed, no unbiased ethical observer.

Ethical issues have been addressed by libraries and other cultural institutions, corporations, non-profit institutions, academia, government agencies at all levels, library and information science research, and in media. Increasingly, scholars from the discipline of Library and Information Science are asking questions more specifically related to information and its life cycle. Terminology used includes ethics in librarianship, ethics and computers, technology and ethics, and other similar terms.

Since the late 1980s, ethics was often referred to as the “ethics of information in society”. From the time when the term first appears in 1988, this topic has been more commonly referred to as “information ethics” (IE). The history and the professional and scholarly literature of IE in its first 20 years parallel and are increasingly intertwined with library ethics; information systems ethics; computer ethics; cyberethics; journalism, communication, and media ethics; image ethics; Internet ethics; and Web ethics. Each of these areas of applied ethics shares roots and relationships with others and with a wide variety of further fields, including engineering ethics and business ethics.

It is crucial to distinguish the research pertaining to IE from the broad field of KO ethics and its ever-growing literature, even though knowledge organization systems ultimately provide access to information. The main issues in IE are listed below; I will highlight those pertaining to information and knowledge organization ethics. The following terms and definitions are provided by the UNESCO’s World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)¹:

- (1) **Digital ethics:** concerns itself with human and digital interactions, including decisions made by humans while interacting with the digital, as well as those decisions made by the digital interacting with humans. Digital ethics includes, in order of appearance into the field, computer ethics, cyberethics, and AI ethics. It places a focus on ethical issues pertaining to such things as software reliability and honesty, artificial intelligence, computer crime, digital transparency and e-commerce. The origins of digital ethics are found in the adoption of ethical concerns into computer science, as influenced by Norbert Wiener’s 1948 *Cybernetics*.
- (2) **Media ethics:** concerns itself with ethical practice in journalism and information dissemination, and includes issues as diverse as conflicts of interest, source transparency, fairness, fake news, and information accuracy. It aims to represent the best interests of the public through impartiality and balance, recognizing and addressing bias, and strives to respect individual privacy while demanding corporate and government

¹ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/wsiv>

transparency. Media ethics makes explicit that journalism and media play a large part in shaping worldviews in society and as such demands a responsibility and personal commitment on the part of the journalist.

- (3) **Library ethics:** alongside ethical considerations for computer science, the field of Information Ethics was first encapsulated under the ethical practices of library and information science in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Library ethics focuses on issues of privacy, censorship, access to information, intellectual freedom and social responsibility. It addresses copyright, fair use, and best practices for collection development. While library ethics originates, in the professional sense, in 19th-century librarianship, it finds its origins in a tradition of information ethics that goes back to ancient Greece.
- (4) **Intercultural information ethics:** this subfield considers perspectives on information dissemination, ICTs and digital culture from the point of view of both globalization and localization. It provides an account of information culture as originating from all cultures, envisaged through comparative philosophies such as Buddhist and western-influenced information ethics traditions to African Ubuntu and Japanese Shinto ethics traditions in ICTs. In its applied sense, intercultural information ethics strives to move beyond the presumed biases of western and Greek-influenced ethical foundations for the field of information ethics to include globally diverse information ethics traditions.

2.2. *The role of professional and institutional bodies in developing information and knowledge organization ethics*

International bodies and institutions promote universal access to all recorded knowledge. From the Belgian visionary Paul Otlet (1868–1944), to the UNESCO's World Summit for Information Society (WSIS), efforts have been made to guarantee and promote this right. This section will focus on the crucial role that professional institutions and associations played in the emergence and development of ethics. These bodies have organized scientific events, conferences and seminars, and published special issues on ethics. A significant number of periodicals, conference proceedings, and other scientific productions has been the basis for this study. The crucial documents for information science are the Professional Guidelines of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, and the Ethical Principles for Library and Information, UK's CILIP² concerned with ethics and information, ethical principles of the library and information professionals. Earlier initiatives have been undertaken by The International Federation of library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in 1973 (see below).

Many conferences on IE have been organized. I list herein some of them: conference on the "Ethics of Electronic Information in the 21st Century" was held at the University of Memphis in 1997; the first UNESCO Conference on InfoEthics was held in 1997 under the name "First International Congress on Ethical, Legal and Societal Aspects of Digital Information"; the International ICIE Symposium was held in 2004 at the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany in 2004; the WSIS forum took place in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in

² Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. See <https://www.cilip.org.uk/>

2005; the first African Conference on Information Ethics was held in South Africa in 2007. Moreover, the WSIS forum, co-hosted by UNESCO, organized three events (see below).

2.2.1. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

As early as 1973 IFLA initiated the Universal Bibliographic Control Program, requiring that national libraries share their holdings and index them with a special attention to cultural specificities. However, this initiative has fallen short, and OCLC and, more recently, Google are taking the control.

2.2.2. UNESCO

UNESCO focuses on the crucial role of information, communication and knowledge as key drivers of development in globalized, multicultural, knowledge-based societies. It discusses the means in which they can be used in order to strengthen ethical development and avoid unethical consequences. The WSIS³ is one of the broadest platforms for debate of these issues. The “First WSIS+10 Review Event” held on 25–27 February 2013 in Paris in its final statement “invites all Stakeholders to encourage international and interdisciplinary reflection and debate on the ethical challenges of emerging technologies and the information society”. Globethics.net, created to serve as a global network of persons and specialists engaged on ethics contributes to the discussion. The text on ethics of information and knowledge societies calls for value-based decisions and actions for the development of information, communication and knowledge. It is based on seven core values: equity, freedom, care and compassion; participation, sharing, sustainability and responsibility. These values are exemplified in nine core topics of the information society, the “Nine P’s”: principles, participation, people, profession, privacy, piracy, protection, power and policy⁴.

In the light of this responsibility, UNESCO held a High Level Dialogue on 10 April 2019 at the WSIS forum in Geneva. The session focused on the ethical dimensions of Artificial Intelligence that can contribute towards sustainable development⁵. Moreover, UNESCO encourages its member states to develop comprehensive language-related policies, to allocate resources and to use appropriate tools to promote and facilitate linguistic diversity and multilingualism, including Internet and media within the framework of UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace.

2.2.3. ICIE: The International Center for Information Ethics

The International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), led by Capurro, is an academic community dedicated to the advancement of the field of information ethics. It offers a platform for an intercultural exchange of ideas and information regarding worldwide

³ WSIS forum met in two sessions in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005). Both aimed to promote access to information and knowledge through new communications technologies and to tackle the global digital divide separating the northern hemisphere from the global South. At the same time it highlighted the ethical dimensions of the Information Society, and underlined the need for measures to safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity and identity, to avoid local content being overshadowed by vested global interests (for more see <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2019/fr>).

⁴ See <https://www.internetsociety.org/issues/internet-governance/wsis/wsis10-overview/>

⁵ For more, see <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2019/>

teaching and research in the field. ICIE creates a community and provides an opportunity for collaboration between colleagues practicing and teaching in the field. It provides news regarding the ongoing activities of various organizations involved in the shared goals of information ethics. The success of the ICIE community is dependent on the efforts and participation of those involved in its formation and continual growth. It is through the sharing of related interests and knowledge with others that ICIE thrives⁶.

2.2.4. ISKO activities: Ethics as a component of knowledge organization research activities

Researchers from ISKO Community (Olson, Fox, Tennis, Guimarães, Smiraglia, Mai, Avila, among many others) have been extremely active in the research on KO ethics. Many conferences were organized by the School of Information Studies at University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Knowledge Organization Research Group, led by Richard Smiraglia (in 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2015). Special issues of "Knowledge Organization" journal and conference proceedings were devoted to ethics. Some were published in "Knowledge Organization" – Proceedings of the 3rd Milwaukee Conference on Ethics in Knowledge Organization, May 28–29, 2015, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA, *Knowledge Organization*, 5, 2015; Special Issue: Subject Ontogeny and Knowledge Organization System Change, *Knowledge Organization*, 8, 2016; Special Issue: A Festschrift for Hope A. Olson, *Knowledge Organization*, 5, 2016. Ethics was the main theme for ISKO-UK last biannual conference: "The Human Position in an Artificial World: creativity, ethics, and AI in KO", London 15–16 July (see Haynes & Vernau (2019) for the proceedings).

3. Ethical dimensions in knowledge organization

Our interest in ethics comes from one of the a foundational principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasizes the ethical treatment of different cultures (Beghtol, 2002). Cultural diversity and multilingualism on the Internet have a key role to play in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open and inclusive knowledge societies. International bodies and institutions promote universal access to all recorded knowledge, as mentioned above. They consider that it is ethically and intellectually crucial to protect cultural and information diversity (Beghtol, 2002).

The role of ethics in knowledge organization has moved from the background to the foreground. Objectivity and literary warrant alone have been shown to be insufficient for ethical knowledge organization (Smiraglia, 2002). Ethical concerns have been demonstrated in the roles of exclusivity and point-of-view, the relationship between literary and cultural warrant, in the creation of KOSs that embrace socio-political symbolism, and in the evolution of standards and professional best practices for implementing knowledge organization systems. Certain factors influence ethical decisions of the information professional – social usefulness, social responsibility, organizational survival, professional survival, self-respect, respect for other individuals and institutions, public and cultural patterns and legal standards (Froehlich, 1994).

⁶ For more, see <https://www.i-c-i-e.org/>

KOSs record knowledge orders and structures as they evolve through scientific and cultural records. The question of ethics in the universal classifications appeared in the early critique of these models and their evolution through time, directing attention to the bias in classifications resulting in the pervasive marginalization and exclusion of topics and groups of people outside the cultural mainstream. In this article I am considering more recent developments following the example of Adler & Tennis (2013), Fox (2011; 2016), Fox & Olson (2012), Guimaraes et al. (2016) and their theoretical dialogues about ethical issues in knowledge organization. Concepts such as interactive epistemography and transcultural ethics of mediation (Gutiérrez, 2002), multilingualism in knowledge representation (Hudon, 1997), cultural hospitality (Beghtol, 2002; 2005) and the power to name (Olson, 1996b; 2002) are crucial for understanding ethical dimension in knowledge organization. A whole set of concepts are drawn from these different theoretical stances and it would be interesting to mention them. It is also crucial to know how we may deal with cultural and linguistic relativism. No one has come up with an adequate answer to these hot questions but it is our responsibility as information professionals, educators and academia to suggest solutions while designing KOSs.

Fallis (2007) has already argued that there are four general types of ethical theory, listed below with examples of practical applications.

- (1) Consequence-based theories – these hold that the right action is that which brings about the best outcome for the greatest number.
- (2) Duty-based theories – these argue that there are certain ethical duties which must always be obeyed, regardless of their consequences.
- (3) Rights-based theories – these suggest that the right thing to do in any situation is determined by the rights we assign to others. This approach was first taken by John Locke, and recently developed by John Rawls for the rights of members of a society. This approach may be particularly useful for ‘code-based’ information ethics, since it is often discussed in the terms of the rights which people have: to have access to information, to be treated respectfully and equally by information providers, to privacy in their information dealings, and so on. Budd (2006), quoted by Fallis (2007), has argued for a rights-based approach to information ethics, giving practical guidance to librarians in particular.
- (4) Virtue-based theories – some have argued that we need an entirely new form of ethics to deal with information issues, based on the centrality of information as a universal entity. According to Fallis (2007) this has been put forward most fully by Luciano Floridi (2013).

3.1. Structural biases generated by mainstream classification and indexing schemes

If we look to the definition of KOS, “knowledge organization system” it refers to tools like library catalogues, taxonomies, and thesauri. These systems attempt to place information in a useful order and to help users understand and use that information. They are interpretations of the domains they represent, and they influence the way users interact with information within the KOS, and potentially beyond its boundaries. In the current information economy, it may be the ultimate form of political power: “The control of information is

power.” The social institutions which have traditionally exercised this power were religious organizations, universities, libraries, healthcare officials, government agencies, banks and corporations. These entities have access to stored information that gives them power over their customers and constituencies. Today every citizen has access to more and more of that stored information without the necessity of using the traditional mediators; of that information and therefore a greater individual share of social power (see Lessig, 1999).

Olson (1996a; 1999) showed that not only the content, but also the fundamental principles of western classifications reflect a particular culture may negate other cultural identities. Hope Olson’s work on marginalization and exclusion of specific topics and groups of people in large library classifications has inspired many authors such as Mai (2016) because it has unraveled the systemic bias found in all classifications. She has also inspired King (1997, quoted by Fox 2016, 375) who argues that “intersectionality is transformative, not additive, in that it does not merely pile up oppressions but creates a new manifestation. [...] each discrimination has a single, direct, and independent effect” on women’s status, “racism, sexism, and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems”. Instead of the traditional library values of neutrality and universality, Olson (2011) suggested a foundation based on plurality and diversity. Clare Beghtol (2002) called for the same approach. Later Olson’s work has inspired Adler and Tennis who suggested a “Taxonomy of Harms” (Adler & Tennis, 2013). The focus and the objectives relate to many of the types of biases outlined above. The authors based their work on the following theoretical foundations: the taxonomy of the damage of Žižek (2008), Haraway (2007, quoted by Adler & Tennis, 2013) and Foucault to explore “semantic violence imposed by language and categories as well as Buddhists damage and suffering” (Adler & Tennis, 2013, 267–270).

Adler & Tennis (2013, 266–267) taxonomy proposes to inventorize the manifestations and implications of the production of suffering by knowledge organization systems through constructing a taxonomy of harm: “What happen when we classify? Intentionality; Implications; Who participates?; Who is affected? Its objectives are:

- (1) To heighten the awareness of the violence that classifications and naming practices carry.
- (2) To reveal the social conditions and motivations that contribute to and are reinforced by knowledge organization systems.
- (3) To advocate for intentional and ethical knowledge organization practices to minimal level of harm.

Hope Olson’s work has also inspired her doctoral student Melody M. J. Fox (2011; 2012; 2016). Her main contribution focuses on “intersectionality” which refers to the

transformative, interlocking, and conflicting oppressions that occur when humans belong to more than one identity category: with black women and has since extended to different variables beyond gender, race, religion to sexual orientations, national origins, disabilities, etc. [...] Oppression can result in consequences from inadvertent discrimination to harassment to violence or death, solely resulting from belonging to a human group (Fox, 2016, 373; see also Tran (2019) for a current research on marginality and non-uniformity in subject representation).

Other researchers have followed Hope’s approach to ethics, e.g., Brazilian Team at the State University of St Paulo at Marilia or, at the University of Lille, the Axe 4 of Laboratoire GERiCO holds a seminar on “Ethical Dimensions in Open Information Ecologies” (the results of which were submitted as EDICOLOGY research project in June 2019).

3.2. *Mainstream indexing and classification systems biases, a legacy? Examples of hierarchy of marginalization, racial discrimination, sexism, exclusion, and ghettoization*

I will explore here only two examples. The first one is drawn from literature. Higgins (2016, 609) examined the term “Asian American” as it emerged in college campuses in the 1960s to replace the term “Oriental”. In her opinion it was a political term, chosen by students to gather people from different ethnic communities under one pan-ethnic banner. She examined the representation of Asian American materials in the first twenty-one editions of the *Dewey Decimal Classification* (DDC) and discussed the findings in relation to the history of the term “Asian American”. The idea is to relate existing literature on bias and knowledge organization to Asian American studies and critical race theories including the “possessive investment in whiteness and racial formation” (Higgins, 2016, 609), to compare the history of the term “Asian American” as a self-identifying term to the evolution of the term in *DDC*; and to lay a historical foundation from which to consider the treatment of the term “Asian American” in the contemporary *DDC* and by extension other modern knowledge organization systems.

She came to the same conclusion as Lipsitz (1998). When writing about Asian Americans the author touches on the idea of the “perpetual foreigner”. “This idea frames the sentiment that no matter how long Asian Americans as individuals or communities live in the United States, they are always viewed as foreigners, and therefore their loyalties to the United States are suspect” (Higgins, 2016, 610).

The second example is taken from the work conducted with Master 1 (Rusquart, 2019) and 2, and PhD students (Tran, 2019) at the University of Lille during our seminars on ethics as part of our research activities. In order to identify biases generated by languages we undertook a review and a comparison between RAMEAU⁷ and LCSH. The main question we raised was: how knowledge organization systems contribute to marginalization, exclusion and stigmatization of a category of the population; and/or of a culture with reference to the French context? To answer it, we have looked at the subject directory authority file RAMEAU built on LCSH principles. By mapping Rameau to LCSH using the indexing term “femme” (eng. *woman*), we found many synonyms, associated terms and many more specific terms in comparison with the term “homme” and its equivalent in English “men”. For example, in RAMEAU there are 73 narrower concepts under “femme”, while only 17 narrower concepts under “hommes”. Among 73 concepts in the former group, we found terms describing woman in all her aspects even the less noble ones, such as Ex-prostituées (Former prostitutes), Femmes abandonnées (Abandoned women), Femmes chamanes (Shamans women), Femmes enceintes (Pregnant women), Femmes esclaves (Slave women),

⁷ RAMEAU (Unified Encyclopedic and Alphabetical Authority Subject Directory) is a subject indexing language. This documentary language is used in France by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, university libraries, many public reading or research libraries and several private organizations. Rameau has been developed since 1980, independently with the “Répertoire de vedettes-matière” from Laval University in Quebec City, and with the list Library of Congress Subject Headings. In 1987, The National Library and the Ministry of Education join forces to jointly manage RAMEAU. In 2001, an agreement was signed by the BnF, ABES, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of National Education to specify the organization of the national network RAMEAU. In 2011, this agreement was renewed.

and so on. Many examples of these terms are stigmatizing, demeaning, and degrading the roles of women. In contrast, if we look for the term “homme” (men), much less terms are displayed, only 17 (Rusquart, 2019). There is a term for “Women philosophers” (Femmes philosophes) in both LCSH and RAMEAU, but no similar term for men, as the concept of “men philosophers” is supposedly included in the general category of “philosophers”.

4. Towards an overall framework for ethics in organizing knowledge

Regarding the activities of knowledge organization and representation, Guimarães (2006) pointed out the problems arising from prejudice, dichotomous categorizations, too specific vision of the world, lack of terminological precision, polysemy, and indiscriminate use of political correctness in representations. In this context, some theoretical conceptions on ethics of knowledge organization and representation can be highlighted in order to face the challenges to promote processes, tools and products that are not tied to a given dominant ideology, and which respect the varied forms of knowledge. Aspects that should be taken into account are:

- (1) The transcultural ethics of mediation, which includes an interactive epistemology (Gutiérrez, 2002) that includes cultural different views and their relationships in order to promote reliability of KOSs by means of a cross-cultural view able to provide disclosure of the various aspects related to knowledge.
- (2) The multicultural dimension of multilingual KOSs (Hudon, 1997), in order to recognize the diverse underlying idiosyncratic views that are present in different semantic structures because languages are more than just a set of words and rules put together and their conceptual and lexical structures reflect the way their speakers see and interact with the world. Thus, multilingual thesauri can act as tools that connect cultures and facilitate interlinguistic communication.
- (3) The cultural warrant based on a multi-ethical foundation for globalized KOSs, allowing the integration of information and knowledge across cultural, social, national, spatial, temporal, linguistic and domain boundaries, and promoting a cultural hospitality by means of KOSs opened to incorporate new concepts and to establish appropriate semantic and syntactic relationships among the old and the new concepts (Beghtol 2002; 2005).
- (4) The ethical use of “the power to name” because the representation of information itself presupposes a power which, making use of processes and tools that are not neutral, but rather constructed and agreed, leads to constructing products that will act as a semblance of the document or as documentary surrogate. In this sense, although KOSs can reflect the mainstream culture of a society, they need to be constantly opened to multiple cultural approaches to avoid marginalization and cultural imperialism (Olson, 1999; 2002).

From this perspective the main challenges of KOSs in a world permeated by a tension between the global and the local approaches would be, according to Guimarães (2006):

- (1) The recognition of diversity as something inherent to KOSs.
- (2) The recognition of the impact of human and social factors on the knowledge organization activities.

- (3) The conception of knowledge organization domain as a social product.
- (4) The suggestive (and not prescriptive) nature of KOSs.
- (5) The KOSs as tools to promote a global dialogue.
- (6) The historical migration from universal systems to global systems.
- (7) The movement from standardization to the promotion of intercommunication and, as a consequence, from the vocabulary control to the promotion of interoperability. KOSs reflect the mainstream culture of a society and, therefore, play a key role in the context of libraries.

By having a dominant feature, once most of these tools have been built and maintained by the mainstream, they allow librarians to work in the margins or in the social and epistemological limits aiming to include different points of view.

We agree with Olson Hope (2002) that the challenge of facing marginalization can be solved by making limits permeable rather than by redefining them or constructing new ones; by making spaces, rather than filling them, and by addressing the relevant discourse in a given context.

We embrace Beghtol's (2002) concepts of "cultural hospitality" and "cultural warrant", which – by complementing one another – imply that KOSs should be "permeable" by different points of view and different cultural attitudes and practices. Although these two concepts are relevant, their implementation may not be easy, as Beghtol observed.

The universal approach in knowledge organization and access has been questioned; it has been argued that authors seeking universality usually imply that diversity (as opposed to universality) is something negative that must be avoided (Olson, 2002). The voice of the others is something that is not always heard in the cleanest or most efficient system design, but in the most ethical and responsible one that also considers people at the margins. As in every spatial system (from linear systems used to organize knowledge in libraries, such as bibliographic classifications, to any means to place and organize items on websites or even city maps), there always are elements or groups placed at the center of the system, what is usually called as mainstream, while other elements are displaced to the margins, and thus marginalized.

The dominant culture usually sees itself as neutral and universally applicable while its characteristics are usually established as the norm and, by default, feature in its systems. Examples of this assumption are the use of English as a communication language even for different communities and groups whose primary language is not English, use of terminology that is natural only to one community or group within a particular language or country, display of a particular flag to represent all the regional variations of a given language around the world, the assumption that text on websites must be read from left to right and from top to bottom, and many other features in design that reflect and impose the culture of the mainstream as the dominant one. Several authors and studies from different countries and cultures at the margins have repeatedly reported problems they had with mainstream standards and design in knowledge organization.

Various approaches were taken to answer these complaints. For instance, Hajdu Barát (2008) listed four possible solutions to linguistic and cultural barriers in knowledge organization: the usage of multilingual thesauri, multilingual subject headings, the adaptation and usage of classification systems which are not based on language as the UDC, and machine translation or machine-aided translation. Examples of current and terminated projects

involving multilingual access and knowledge organization include Minerva Knowledge Base⁸ and MICHAEL⁹, MACS (Multilingual Access to Subjects) (Clavel-Merrin, 2004), Calimera¹⁰, Madiera project (Multilingual Access to Data Infrastructures of the European Research Area)¹¹, and TIIARA (Taxonomy for Image Indexing and Retrieval) (Ménard, 2012). The case of TIIARA is an example of a project for improving access to information that has been recently expanded from bilingual to multilingual (Ménard et al., 2016).

Related to cultural aspects such as gender, Olson and her team at the University of Alberta (Canada) developed a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in which they mapped the DDC to a feminist context using “A Women’s Thesaurus”. Olson acknowledged that a direct inspiration for this project was Oh Dong-Guen and Yeo Ji-Suk’s adaptation of DDC religion schedules for use in countries characterized by religious diversity such as Korea (Dong-Geun & Ji-suk, 2001, quoted by Martínez-Ávila, 2009). Although Olson’s project was terminated by OCLC (for copyright reasons as mentioned by the author) and the end-user interface was never made public, it actually served its intended purpose as a model for other similar projects involving local adaptations to diverse cultures and contexts (Martínez-Ávila, 2009). This author, for instance, designed an application allowing the creation of local classifications for different contexts (cultures) that would interconnect using the UDC as a switching language. In this project, users from a given culture would adapt a universal language to their context and use it to interoperate with other cultures while taking advantage of a distributed network of adaptations (EKOS Interface).

5. Concluding remarks and perspectives

In order to deal effectively with the ethical issues they face, library professionals, institutions providing knowledge must have a good working knowledge of information ethics. Codes of professional ethics can help to provide such knowledge, but they are not sufficient. Unfortunately, there is no universally agreed set of ethical principles which would help. However, some models and guidance might be drawn from Adler & Tennis (2013) Taxonomy of Harm. This model is intended as the basis for an ontology which will be used as a component of EDICOLOGY project submitted in June 2019.

To go further, courses on information ethics must be part of the education of information professionals and knowledge organization systems designers. Such courses should provide information professionals and those dealing with research with an understanding of ethical theories and their relevance to concrete practical cases. Such courses should also make explicit the connection between information ethics and the mission of the library professional, research Infrastructures.

In order to move forward and to find better solutions to harm and the damaging legacy of the biased classifications imposed by the mainstream authorities. It is our duty to

⁸ <http://www.minervaeurope.org/>

⁹ <http://michael-culture.org/>

¹⁰ The CALIMERA website (www.calimera.org) is no longer available. For the short overview, see Faletar (2005).

¹¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/67319/>

build on the current research methodologies to achieve this. I would like to conclude this paper with the statement “let us get rid of the ghosts of racism sexism, stigmatization and marginalization”.

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Kulturowe ramy etyki. Wyzwania dla organizacji informacji i wiedzy

Abstrakt

Cel/Teza: Podczas projektowania systemów organizacji wiedzy, aspekt kulturowy wyznacza jedną z ram interpretacyjnych, do której zalicza się również wymiar społeczny i polityczny. Mają one istotny wpływ na rozważania na temat etycznej natury systemów organizacji wiedzy. W artykule scharakteryzowano kulturowe ramy etyki poprzez identyfikację kluczowych typów uprzedzeń w systemach organizacji wiedzy. Tego typu uprzedzenia zostały zbadane przez pryzmat etyki. Główny nacisk w rozważaniach położono na uprzedzenia strukturalne obecne w uniwersalnych schematach klasyfikacyjnych i innych językach informacyjno-wyszukiwawczych. Omówiono również problemy natury teoretycznej, przedstawiono wybrane przykłady uprzedzeń o charakterze kulturowym i rasowym oraz zaproponowano wybrane kierunki dalszych prac w tym obszarze.

Koncepcja/Metody badań: W artykule wykorzystano analizę i krytykę piśmiennictwa w celu identyfikacji metod wykrywania stronniczości w systemach organizacji wiedzy. Na tej podstawie przeanalizowano dwa języki informacyjne RAMEAU oraz LCSH w celu wykrycia przejawów marginalizacji, wykluczenia i stygmatyzacji w odniesieniu do francuskiego kontekstu kulturowego.

Wyniki i wnioski: Praktyczna wiedza z zakresu etyki informacji wśród pracowników bibliotek oraz innych instytucji informacyjnych jest niezbędna do skutecznego rozwiązywania problemów etycznych w systemach organizacji wiedzy.

Oryginalność/Wartość poznawcza: Zdefiniowano kulturowe ramy etyki i przedstawiono kilka przykładów, które pokazują trudności w eliminacji uprzedzeń w systemach organizacji wiedzy. Wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez autorkę wraz z jej studentami na temat zakresu i rodzaju uprzedzeń w RAMEAU pokazały, że praca na rzecz eliminacji tych uprzedzeń dała pozytywne rezultaty, ale tylko w przypadku LCSH. W innych językach informacyjno-wyszukiwawczych opartych na LCSH przejęto i pozostawiono obecne tam różne typy uprzedzeń. Autorka postuluje systematyczną walkę z uprzedzeniami obecnymi w systemach organizacji wiedzy.

Słowa kluczowe

Etyka informacji. Kulturowe ramy etyki. Stronniczość w systemach organizacji wiedzy.

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