Applied Linguistics View of Cataloguing and Classification Library Books

Joseph O Omoniyi*, Olorunfemi**, Doreen Yemisi***

Abstract

This study examined language skills in the context of library books cataloguing and classification and discovered a synergy between reading skills and cataloguing/classification process. Librarians will overcome the peculiar problem of assigning wrong subject heading(s) and class marks to library books only if they are equipped with literal, inferential, evaluative and creative reading comprehension skills. Librarians must understand the morph syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features in the texts that they are to catalogue. This linguistic knowledge and application require exposing students of Library Science to Applied Librarianship Pedagogy.

Keywords: Language skills; Reading comprehension skills; Cataloguing and classification; Linguistic features; Applied librarianship.

Introduction

Language is perceived as a vehicle through which human beings communicate between one another. Many languages exist in the world and in Nigeria alone, linguists have identified over three hundred different languages, several hundreds of dialects and idiolects. The first language that a child acquires is called first language (L1) or the Mother tongue while any other language or languages that a person learns in addition to the first language is known as second language (L2).

There are four basic skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing in that order of acquisition. While the first two (listening, speaking) are receptive language skills, the latter two (reading, writing) are the productive skills of language. Librarians make use of the receptive language skills for inter-personal communication with colleagues and library clientele. They also employ the productive language skills to execute library tasks, routines and services.

Reading and Writing Processes

Lawal (1993) traced the modern understanding of reading comprehension to the early twentieth century. According to him, prior to 1917, scholars had viewed reading comprehension mainly as a linguistic process. They, thus, defined reading as the ability of a reader to transform printed words into oral responses. By 1917, research work led to a change in the linguistic perspective of reading in favour of psycholinguistic re-definition of reading as an embodiment of reasoning.

Following closely behind the psycholinguistic view on reading comprehension, was the pragmatic view which submitted that readers varied their reading processes because of changes in the purposes for which they read their texts, and the type and difficulty of material being read (Singer, 1992). Pragmatic reading emphasizes language use or reading in context. That is, one must establish the purpose for reading a text and thereafter employs reasoning

Author's Affilation: *Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina, Nigeria, **&*** Librarian, Adekunle Ajasin University Library, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria.

Reprint's request: Joseph O Omoniyi, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina, Nigeria. E-mail: jsomoniyi@yahoo.com.

processes to react appropriately to ideas and information that the text contains. The concensus of opinion is that comprehension is the aim for reading a text. Furthermore, reading comprehension involves linguistic, psycholinguistic and pragmatic reading skills.

Writing, as a linguistic activity, involves human communication through the printed format. That is, a person is engaged in writing when he/she puts his/her thoughts down in black and white. Writing entails the use of language and that is why writing is one of the four skills of language. as one reads what others have written down so also one writes for others to read. The most prominent aspects of librarianship in which reading comprehension and writing skills play domineering role are cataloguing and classification, indexing and abstracting. Writing skill is also desirable for effectiveness in the execution of other library routines and services.

Cataloguing and Classification Process

Browman (2003) defined cataloguing as a process of preparing a list of books by librarians. Classification involves grouping of books into their various subject areas. Classification makes it possible to put materials in related disciplines together for easy identification. In this paper cataloguing and classification are used interchangeably in reference to the process and product of assigning subject heading(s) and class marks to library materials by librarians. According to Omoniyi (2008), cataloguing and classification is both a process and a product of a systematic description of printed and non-printed information resources in the library so that users of the resources would have easy access to the materials in the library catalogue and on the library shelves.

There are two main parts to cataloguing: descriptive and subject cataloguing. While descriptive cataloguing refers to the description of the physical and bibliographic details e.g. author, title, ISBN etc of a text, subject cataloguing is about providing a

subject heading as access point to the material. The American Library Association Glossary of Library and Information Science (1983) defined a subject heading as "an access point consisting of words or phrases which designate the subject of a text". To catalogue and classify a text, the librarian first reads through appropriate parts of the material containing the words or phrases that express the subject coverage of the text. The librarian decodes meanings from the words or phrases, reconstructs new terms from the expressions where required and uses the items to determine the subject heading(s) that are most appropriate for the material. The fact is that librarians catalogue and classify library texts by pointing out important search features such as the author, the title, the subject heading and the class mark so that library users can locate the texts of their choice through any of the search variables.

Brophy (2001) and Aina (2004) severally submitted that accurate and consistent cataloguing and classification of library materials presupposes that the librarian has the pre-requisite reading comprehension skills for determining the bibliographic features in the text and the words and phrases that can be chosen as the most appropriate subject heading(s) for the material. As Omoniyi, (1997), aptly put it, a library material that carries wrong subject heading(s) and class mark is best considered lost. This is because the target users of the material will neither be able to either retrieve information about the text in the library catalogues nor locate the item where it is supposed to be found on the library shelf. The panacea to such cataloguing and classification error is for the librarian to, therefore, deploy the appropriate reading and cataloguing skills in the process of cataloguing and classifying library texts.

Taxonomy of Reading and Cataloguing Skills

In the process of cataloguing and classifying library texts, the librarian searches for three linguistic features in the text to enhance ability to arrive at more accurate and consistent

subject heading(s) and class mark of the material. Morph syntactic feature refers to the individual word formation e.g. Noun, Pronoun, Adjective, Verb etc which the author of the text employs in the work. The semantic feature refers to the natural meaning of the individual work (morphosyntax) in the text and the Pragmatic feature refers to when or why the word is used the way the author uses it in the text.

The subject heading of a text takes any of the following seven linguistic features. At the level of word formation (morphosyntax) the library determines the subject heading through

i.   Single word Noun, e.g. Genetics, Chemistry, Libraries

ii. Compound Noun – These are two Nouns joined together by a coordinating conjunction "and", e.g. Libraries and Archives, Nutrition and Home Economics

iii. Compound Noun Phrase, e.g. Oral Librarianship, Mobile Library

iv. Adjectival Phrase, e.g. Medical Library, New World

v.   Prepositional Phrase, e.g. Cataloguing of Books, Songs on the rock

vi. Parenthetical Phrase, Oral Librarianship – Nigeria, Applied Librarianship – Study and Teaching

vii. Synonyms as pointed our earlier, language does not merely operate at the level of forms; it also involves both meaning and use. Since a word can have more than one meaning (synonyms), the librarian choses the word or term that best represents the possible balance among synonymous ones to be the most appropriate choice as subject heading for a text. The effort here is to ensure that the word or term chosen as the heading for the material actually connects associate terms that are related. The associate terms can take the form of use, used for, Narrow, Related or Broad Term(s) to the word or term chosen as the heading for the text in either hierarchical, preferential or affinitive relationships (Aina, 2004). For example,

1. Hierarchical relationship
    Journalism
    BT (Broader Term)   Press
    Media
    Press
    NT (Narrower Term) Journalism
    Broadcasting

2. Preferential relationship
    Librarianship
    USE Library Science
    UF Librarianship

3. Affinitive relationship
    Media
    RT (Related Term) Press
    Press
    RT Media

Very often the title of a text does not describe the subject of the material adequately. Such title may be in idiomatic, proverb or figurative of any type. What the librarian does in the circumstance is to determine the meaning of the entire expression in context rather than finding meanings to the individual words that form the expression. For example the title of a book is "The Breast of the Earth: Historical and Anthropological Survey of African Literature". The librarian cannot rely on the ordinary meaning of the expression or the words in it to determine the accurate subject heading of the material. Although, the subtitle throws some light on the probable subject that the text covers, it will be wrong if the librarian just goes ahead and assign "African literature" as the subject heading of the material. This is because the entire title is a figurative expression which requires pragmatic approach for creative interpretation of the title before the librarian can arrive at accurate subject heading(s) for the text.

Applied linguists have subsumed reading comprehension and cataloguing skills under morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of language and came up with a taxonomy of reading comprehension and

cataloguing skills that librarians deploy for accurate and consistent cataloguing and classification of library materials.
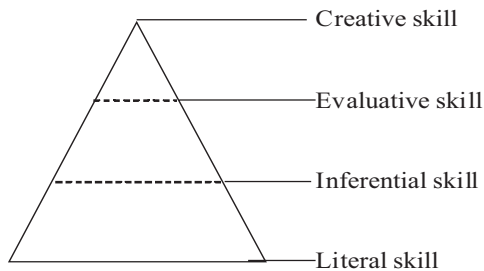
Hierarchical Taxonomy of Cataloguing and Classification Skills (adapted from William and Lawal (1995), Omoniyi, J. O., 2008).

Literal Skill

In the order of complexity, the literal skill is the lowest level of cataloguing and reaching comprehension skill. At this level, the librarian reads through part(s) of a text to be catalogued for the purpose of getting the surface meaning of words and phrases in the text. Primarily, the librarian does the literal reading of the text to identify single word noun, e.g. Electron, or compound nouns, e.g. libraries and unionism and adjectival phrases e.g. Libraries, Academic that can be chosen as the subject heading(s) of the material. At the literal level of cataloguing performance, the librarian also recalls relevant and irrelevant information or ideas in a text with a view to utilizing the relevant one to determine the subject matter and subsequently the subject heading of the material. Adebileje (2001) observed that to perform effectively in a reading – based task, such as book cataloguing, the quality of literal comprehension skill that the reader possesses is dictated by the level of difficulty of the material itself and the amount of information that the reader requires to recall words, phrases, information or ideas in the text.

What the librarian does at the literal level of cataloguing is to, first and foremost, read through the appropriate part(s) of the text and

a. get directly stated facts in the text

b. derive literal meaning from words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the text

c. identify and choose the correct applicable meanings from ambiguous words and expressions in the text

d. recall or re-tell information in the text

e. identify relevant and irrelevant information or ideas in the text.

Omoniyi (2002) investigated the reading comprehension skills needs of cataloguers in Kwara State and found that they indeed required the literal skill of reading to be able to locate, recognize, recall words and phrases in a text. Abe (1991) and Adegbileje (2001) however cautioned that the literal skill of performance in any reading – based task is only a pre – requisite to the other higher skills which are equally required for effectiveness in reading – based tasks.

Inferential Skill

In the hierarchy of complexity, the inferential skill of cataloguing is next to that of the literal skill. At the inferential level, the librarian reads the book to be catalogued "between the lines", seeking for deeper meaning of words, phrases, clauses and sentences that the author of the text uses to communicate with the readers. The personal background knowledge of the scope of the text is required to enable the librarian synthesize the content of the material. According to Olajide (1989), inferential skill entails ability of the reader of a text to think inductively and deductively about relationships among words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the text and infer deeper meaning(s) from the relationships.

The librarian operates with a number of sub skills for accurate and consistent cataloguing of library books. According to Omoniyi (2002), the librarian deploys inferential skill for

i.   interpreting the author's meaning(s) correctly

ii. deriving inferences from author's statements

iii. integrating information obtained in the text to form whole ideas

iv. deriving meaning(s) from figurative expressions

v. weaving minor ideas in the text together to become major ideas

vi. recognizing the author's purpose(s) for writing the text

vii. summarizing main ideas/points into subject heading(s)

viii. distinguishing facts from opinions, relevant from irrelevant ideas or points

Evaluative Skill

The evaluative skill is the next level in the hierarchy of cataloguing skills. Often referred to as the critical level, the librarian, thus, uses critical mind to pass judgement, or, form opinions about the content of a text. Such opinion or judgement is often directed at relating diagrams, pictures, photographs and other illustrations in the text to the subject matter of the material. By this knowledge, the librarian is able to determine which subject area or discipline that the illustrative materials in the text primarily focus and therefore relate the illustrations to the subject heading proposed for the text.

The evaluative level of book cataloguing therefore goes beyond the ability of the librarian to go beyond both the surface and deeper meanings of the literal and inferential levels respectively (Lawal 1990; Musulimi, 2002). Omoniyi (2002) submitted that, at the evaluative level of performance in a reading – based task such as book cataloguing, the librarian (reader) separates facts from opinions; compares and contrasts the contents of texts on the basis of which the librarian selects words or phrases that best represent the subject heading(s) of the material.

Creative Skill

The creative skill of book cataloguing and classification occupies the higher level in the hierarchy of reading comprehension and

cataloguing skills. At the creative level, the librarian masters the textual details and psychomotor expertise required to practically enter on to the 3 by 5 cataloguing cards and on the spine of the text its bibliographic details: author, title, subject headings, etc as well as the class mark of the text of be catalogued respectively. Musilimi (2002) submitted that it is at the creative level that the reader of a text is supposed to have acquired the kind of awareness, skill and competence that can enable him/her perform certain reading – based tasks which he/she would not have been able to perform if he/she had not approached the text with the creative skill.

According to Adebileje (2001), a reader is said to be creative only if he/she is able to summarise the major ideas in a text into accurate textual message of the author relate the ideas to the focus of the text and practical write down answers to the questions in reading – based tasks. In the case of the librarian, he/she reads a text with high level of mastery of the morphosyntactic, semantic, pragmatic features in the text, and his/her professional competence in bibliography its write the subject details and class mark of the text on catalogue cards and the spine of the material. It is at the creative level that the librarian actually demonstrates that the synergy between reading comprehension skills and cataloguing and classification competence is the deployment of the literal, inferential, evaluative and creative skills to the process of reading and cataloguing library materials.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Cataloguing of library books is a process of reading comprehension targeted at discovering words, phrases, clauses and sentences or expressions that make up the subject matter of a text. It is also a product of mastery and deployment of the linguistic skills of reading and to some extent, writing to practical assign subject heading(s), class marks and other required bibliographic details to library materials. It can therefore he concluded

that thee is a synergy between some linguistic features of reading comprehension and writing and the utilization of the linguistic knowledge to practically catalogue and classify library texts by librarians in a way that the target users of the materials will find information about the items in the library catalogues and locate the materials where they are supposed to be found on the library shelves. It is also a fact from the analysis in this paper is that.

Librarian's accurate and consistent cataloguing and classification of library materials is dictated by the combined skills of writing and reading comprehension as well as his/her competence in bibliography communication.

Library science curriculum writers and educators should accept the fact that the synergy between communication and effective library service delivery and library routine execution has made the concept of Applied Librarianship a reality in library science pedagogy. Therefore, language skills should a compulsory course in student librarians thereby contributing to the emergence of Applied Librarians in the unity of specialists in related disciplines.

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