



University of Mosul
College of Art
Dept. of information and knowledge Techniques

Course Name: Container Organizing tools
Stage: Masters
Lecturer Name: Prof. Rafal N. A.
School Study: 2025-2026

Subject Control Tools

1. Subject Heading Lists

It is well known among librarians that determining subject headings and selecting appropriate terms that best express the intellectual content of a scientific work depends on the availability of standardized subject heading lists to assist in choosing the appropriate heading for the subject of the item being cataloged. This is because personal judgments and opinions of librarians vary from one person to another. To achieve standardization in formulating subject headings and in defining their meanings and usages, it is necessary to follow a unified and consistent policy in entering all books on the same subject under a single subject entry, using the same form and terminology—so that subjects do not become scattered under various terms. This is exactly what subject heading lists provide: they include subject headings, references, and subdivisions used therein. In this regard, they parallel classification schemes and descriptive cataloging rules.

Subject heading lists can be divided into two main categories:

1. General Subject Heading Lists: These include comprehensive subject headings covering all fields of human knowledge in general. They are often used in large public and national libraries with large and diverse collections. They can also be used in medium-sized libraries.
2. Specialized and Highly Specialized Subject Heading Lists (Specific): These are lists containing subject headings specialized in a particular subject field or domain, with all its branches and subdivisions. Their coverage is limited to a single specific field and includes all subject headings related to it. They are typically used in small and medium-sized libraries to meet the needs of their specialized users in that field. Highly specialized lists, on the other hand, contain even more specific subject headings, serving a narrow sub-field of knowledge, and are often limited to departmental libraries or projects dealing with that specific specialization.

Below are examples of each type:

Foreign Subject Heading Lists



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Among the most significant points regarding foreign subject heading lists is the considerable number that have been introduced in the library arena—especially in Europe and America—and their long-standing use in catalogs and bibliographies. The aspiration toward building a standard subject heading list in the United States began after the publication of the first edition of Cutter's Rules for a Dictionary Catalog in 1876, to be used in applying those rules. Poole's idea of creating a list of headings and references issued as an independent publication, modeled on Roget's Thesaurus, was a useful step in developing sources for an alphabetical subject index or a dictionary catalog of books. The "Fourth Conference of Libraries" held in Boston in 1879 pointed to the great need for creating a standard subject heading list. However, the actual steps can be traced back to 1892, when this topic was raised at the "Lakewood Conference of the American Library Association." A committee was subsequently formed under Cutter's chairmanship, and after three years of work, the first standard foreign subject heading list was issued in 1895.

General Foreign Lists

The most important examples of this type of standard list are:

ALA Subject Heading List

The first standard foreign subject heading list established as a basis to meet the needs of public and medium-sized libraries was the American Library Association list. Its first edition appeared in 1895, which was both necessary and urgent—to be used first in applying Cutter's rules and, second, to develop sources for the alphabetical subject index and the dictionary catalog of books. The third and final edition of this list was published in 1911.

It should be noted that this list has lost its currency today. However, its importance lies in the fact that it demonstrated the significance of using standard subject heading lists and had a lasting influence on subsequent lists in terms of subject heading forms.

Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)

It can be said that this list is one of the most comprehensive and detailed foreign subject heading lists, as it originated and evolved within the vast collections of millions of items and information resources held by the Library of Congress. It covers all fields of human knowledge. Hence, its use and fame have spread both within and outside the United States—in large libraries, academic libraries, and specialized libraries. Even some highly specialized libraries use this list selectively. Given the importance of this list in the practical



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part of this study—since it is used by the Central Library of the University of Mosul—the researcher has chosen to address it in some detail.

The compilation of this list began in 1897, relying on the ALA Subject Heading List as its foundation. This resulted in the first edition of the list, for which Hanson is largely credited with establishing its foundations (LCSH).

The Library of Congress continued to issue annual editions of the list up to the two most recent editions: the 27th edition in 2004, and the 28th edition, which appeared in spring 2005 in five volumes.

The latest edition included all Library of Congress subject headings, totaling approximately 270,000 subject headings along with their references. It is the most recent paper edition issued by the Library to date, and it is also available electronically on the Internet.

What most distinguishes the last two editions is the appearance of an alphabetical index of subdivisions in separate lists, published annually, rather than appearing in the subject authority file under a single heading. This helps in locating information in the Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings, which has been available on the Internet since 1996 in its fifth edition.

Why is the Library of Congress List More Important than Its Predecessors, and What Are the Reasons for Its Ongoing Success?

Chan summarized the main reasons for the success of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), as confirmed by Hanson, Miska, Haykin, Mann, and others who wrote on this subject. She pointed out that the list's continuity and success are due to its constant development and updating of its subject headings and plans, which has made it influential among its users. Moreover, its contents and subdivisions are not limited to use in the subject catalog alone, which has led most modern systems to regard it as a competitor—such as the PRECIS indexing system and others. Perhaps keeping pace with contemporary developments and the fluctuations experienced by libraries—whether at the technical level, policies, procedures, or availability on the Internet—are also important reasons for its continued relevance.

Therefore, the Library of Congress has dedicated considerable effort to developing its subject list to serve as an effective and objective online retrieval tool that can be integrated with local or international systems and linked to computerized bibliographic records. It is also used to display OPAC pages specific to the Library of Congress list—a feature not available in other retrieval utilities such as OCLC.



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One of the main advantages of this enhanced system is its ability to reveal critical deficiencies in cross-reference practices, gather all related subjects together in a separate pre-coordinated list with its own subject headings, and partially control the list's vocabulary while benefiting from the tracking data displayed by OPAC pages as alternative search elements for users.

Despite all the successes achieved by LCSH, certain obstacles still prevent it from reaching perfection. Perhaps the most significant of these is the extreme sensitivity and inferiority complex toward change exhibited by traditional librarians, possibly for psychological and economic reasons. There is also a lack of completeness in the theoretical foundation—a need for a standardized subject cataloging framework that could serve as a philosophical measure. This deficiency may stem from insufficient time devoted by subject cataloging practitioners to developing a theory of subject headings. Other issues relate to the list's online users, which the librarians maintaining the list are trying to address: users' understanding of the system and optimal subject retrieval methods, the most appropriate vocabulary they should use to access all materials related to their subject, and other problems the list seeks to overcome by providing manuals accompanying new systems and other supporting tools.

Sears List of Subject Headings

The pressing need for a less comprehensive and expansive list than LCSH, one more in harmony with the needs of American medium-sized and small libraries, was the primary reason that prompted Minnie Earl Sears to prepare a subject heading list suitable for those libraries. The first edition of this list appeared under the title "A List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries." Subsequent editions followed up to the 16th edition in 1997, which included more than 15,000 subject headings. Although Sears passed away after the third edition, publication continued under its current title, retaining the name "Sears" in recognition of her contribution.

Arabic Subject Heading Lists

The efforts made in issuing Arabic subject heading lists cannot be overlooked or ignored. This may be due to the numerous recommendations issued regarding the preparation of Arabic subject heading lists at library conferences held at the Arab level under the supervision of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), from 1959 to 1977. All of these recommendations emphasized the necessity of preparing a comprehensive and standardized Arabic subject heading list, and maintaining it to meet the needs of libraries and information centers in the Arab world, through a committee of Arab specialists appointed for the task. All this served as a great impetus for further efforts in this direction.

The most important examples of this type of subject heading list are:



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Ibrahim al-Khazindar's List

The Arabic Subject Heading List by Ibrahim al-Khazindar can be considered the first general Arabic subject heading list. It is still used to this day in a considerable number of Arab libraries. Its compiler was among the first to show interest in the idea of an Arabic subject heading list. This interest resulted in the publication of the first edition of the list in 1958 under its current title, containing approximately 2,900 subject headings.

Zahida Ibrahim's List

What is particularly notable about this list, whose only edition was published in 1977 containing approximately 4,000 subject headings, is that its headings were originally taken from the Library of Congress Subject Headings. The compiler included an explanatory introduction outlining her methodology in 12 points. It should be noted that this list has lost much of its currency today due to the lack of new editions to keep pace with contemporary developments.

Riyadh University List

This list was prepared in 1977 and published by the Cataloging and Classification Department at Riyadh University in 1978, under the supervision of Nasser Al-Swaidan. It was compiled from several Arabic and English subject heading lists and contained about 5,000 subject headings and references. This list may have represented a step toward a comprehensive Arabic subject heading list, as it incorporated most previous experiences and added many rules and explanations on usage.

One criticism leveled at it is that it was not edited and revised rigorously enough to eliminate the differences between the various levels of those who participated in compiling and formulating its headings. A second edition was published in 1985.

The Major Arabic Subject Headings List

This list is considered highly commendable, which led the researcher to discuss it in some detail—not out of bias toward its use by the Central Library (the subject of the study), but because it is the largest and most comprehensive Arabic subject heading list, in keeping with its name and the number of its headings.



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This list originated as a result of a joint Arab effort commissioned by ALECSO. Shaaban Abdul Aziz Khalifa and Mohamed Awad Al-Aydi were assigned the task of preparing it, and their work resulted in the publication of the first edition of the Major Arabic Subject Headings List in 1985.

The use of this list was not confined to a single country but extended throughout the Arab world, due to the large number of subject headings it contained—exceeding 25,000—in addition to its similarity in many aspects, especially regarding the forms of subject headings, to the Library of Congress list. Yosriya Zayed noted that this first edition was experimental, and that the second, enlarged and revised edition, published in 1994 by the same compilers and under the same title, confirms that this work deserves praise. It is considered an important addition and a strong contribution toward providing the broadest Arabic subject heading list still in existence. The fact that both compilers are well-known Arab librarians in the field of library and information science in general, and cataloging in particular, adds further value to this list. Additionally, it has made an effective contribution to filling the gaps that Arab libraries suffer from in determining and formulating Arabic subject headings in most of those countries.

The Unified Arabic Subject Headings List

It is observed that the Arabic subject heading lists available in the library arena—though some are worthy of attention—have not been used as a unified basis in their structure. This prompted ALECSO to lay down foundations for the implementation of a unified Arabic subject heading list. These foundations were studied through the Committee for Developing Traditional and Automated Technical Foundations in the Field of Documentation and Information, held in Amman in 1980, in an attempt to issue a unified and standardized list built on objective foundations. Accordingly, ALECSO commissioned Professor Mahmoud Ahmed Atim to prepare this list. Its first edition was published in 1995 under the title "The Unified Arabic Subject Headings List." It is thus the most recent known Arabic subject heading list to date. It appeared in a single volume containing more than 10,500 subject headings. Its introduction states: "This list is a response to the repeated calls made by catalogers in libraries and information centers in the Arab world, and is not merely another Arabic subject heading list added to the series of previously published lists. Moreover, this list has sought to avoid the errors and weaknesses that plagued earlier lists."

Modern Arabic Lists

- The Standard Subject Headings List
- The Unified Arab Catalog Index List

These are the most recently used and widely disseminated subject heading lists across the Arab world. The first is the latest paper edition, published in 2002. The second is available electronically online for libraries participating in the Unified Arab Catalog project.



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