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The Lifeworld in the Library's Backroom: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Cataloguer's Lived Experience of Aboutness Determination

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LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ABOUTNESS DETERMINATION

by

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ABSTRACT
THE LIFEWORLD IN THE LIBRARY'S BACKROOM:
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This research is interested in the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination. Aboutness determination, a part of subject cataloguing where the cataloguer attempts to identify the subject matter of a resource, is a process often taken for granted and largely neglected by the library community. Yet, aboutness determination is an essential stage in subject cataloguing worthy of greater attention. There is a need for a deeper understanding of the cataloguer's relatedness to the resource in aboutness determination. This hermeneutic phenomenological study examines the lifeworld of three professional cataloguers. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and through talk-aloud analysis of resources, the interpreted findings provide access to the lived experience of cataloguers in aboutness determination, thus providing insight into this phenomenon. What is revealed is that aboutness determination involves a variable encounter, predisposed by systems and structures, in which the cataloguer acts as an intermediate agent in consideration of the resource and the user. The signification of this understanding is thoughtfulness. It is to give heed to the experience as it is, and to illuminate the essential qualities of that experience so that it may be understood more fully.

To silence, and what it has taught me about listening.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is unlikely that those outside the library profession consider the details and work behind constructing bibliographic records in a library catalogue. To most, the library catalogue is just an information retrieval tool. It is taken for granted when working well and something to conquer, fear, loath, and/or abandon when complications arise. The subject index is one of the tools of the library catalogue most often misunderstood and neglected, especially in the wake of keyword searching. Contributing to this problem are low levels of end-user subject heading understanding (Drabenstott, Simcox, & Fenton, 1999). Subject searching is the most difficult search for library users (Guo and Huang, 2011). In discussion with friends and family on the topic of this thesis, it was observed that many were not even familiar with the subject index, much less how it works.

Cataloguers, too, often grapple with subject cataloguing. Taylor & Joudrey (2009) state that "historically, subject access has been one of the most challenging aspects of organizing information" (p. 303). A particular aspect of subject indexing involves determining what the resource is about, also known as aboutness determination, so that appropriate subject headings can be attributed to the work. Although an unfamiliar term to many, aboutness is not foreign to most people's experience. Ask someone to describe what something is about and they will share its aboutness. Although aboutness determination is accessible to a larger population, it is anything but simplistic. For the aboutness determined by one may be different, even if only slightly, from another. Whose

is right? "The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written" (Iser, 1972, p. 283). Because of the accessibility of this phenomenon, and its equally complicated nature, I became increasingly interested in understanding aboutness determination within the context of subject cataloguing.

Aboutness determination, often referred to as "conceptual analysis," "content analysis," or "subject analysis," denotes the process of determining what the resource is about for purposes of subject cataloguing. It forms part of a two or three stage process in subject cataloguing, depending on the reference consulted. For example, Langridge (1989) identifies two stages of subject analysis, and aboutness determination forms the first part:

a) Subject analysis;

b) Translation of the perceived subject into the appropriate notation of a classification scheme or the selected vocabulary of a subject headings list (pp. 5-6).

In contrast, ISO 5963-1985 identifies three stages in subject indexing. Aboutness determination involves the first two stages:

a) Examining the document and establishing the subject content;

b) identifying the principal concepts present in the subject;

c) expressing these concepts in the terms of the indexing language (p. 2).

The outline provided by ISO 5963-1985 includes mention of a document, in contrast to Langridge, where the resource is implied. This aspect of relatedness is essential to the act of aboutness determination. There is an *intentional* relationship between the consciousness of the cataloguer and the object of her consciousness, which is the resource. Note that the term intentional is being used in a different way from its everyday usage. Rather, it is the root of the term *intentionality*, which is used "to describe the process occurring in consciousness and the object of attention for that process" (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2012, p. 13). Budd (1995) explains further:

> What is primary about intentionality is that it constitutes an unmistakable link between 'I' and 'other'… We cannot forget that the entirety of the library signifies, directly or indirectly, the product of intentionality. The catalog, the physical and conceptual organization, even the physical structure itself are consciously created by an I (be the 'I' individual or collective). The library user - another I - adopts an intentional stance when perceiving the aspects of a library. To the user, then, the library (or its catalog or classification system) is the other (p. 312).

Intentionality is an important consideration here because it is the cataloguer's experience of relating to the resource in the act of aboutness determination that this research seeks to uncover.

Problem statement

This qualitative study involves an examination and an interpretation of the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination through a hermeneutic

phenomenological approach to human science research. It seeks to understand what it is like for cataloguers in the act of aboutness determination; their essential qualities of experience in relating to the resource for this purpose. Aboutness determination is a fairly invisible process. Particular attention is devoted to descriptive accounts of catalogers' lived experience to gain access to this invisible process, and to come to greater understanding of experience. By understanding the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination, it may be possible to make sense of, and to give meaning to experience beyond abstract thought. Rather, meaning is derived from essential qualities of experience gathered from the lifeworld of the cataloguer.

Significance of the research

Why is it important to understand the lived experience of cataloguers in aboutness determination? What value does such an understanding provide to the LIS community? To answer this question, I will refer to a statement made by Smiraglia that "a cataloguer is not an automaton" (personal communication, December 2011). An automaton is "an individual who acts in a mechanical fashion" (Merriam-Webster, automaton). If Smiraglia's statement is true, then a cataloguer is not simply producing "factory-line" catalogue records, and aboutness determination is not a predetermined sequence of operations leading to a determinate set of results. If there is agreement that a cataloguer is not an automaton, then there is a need to understand what a cataloguer is, and what it is like for her in relating to the resource for aboutness determination. To do so, this research advocates a temporary suspension of theory and presupposition for the purpose of entering into the lifeworld of the cataloguer. This provides an opportunity to see things as they are. By understanding things as they are, there is greater potential for a meaningful

appraisal of the cataloguer's relatedness to a resource in aboutness determination. It is, essentially, a "caring act", motivated by a desire to truly know the "secrets and intimacies" associated with the subject of interest (van Manen, 2007, p. 5).

To date, there is no research that explores the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination. Šauperl's (1999) qualitative study examined the entire process of subject cataloguing in real-life situations using talk-aloud and interviews. Her sample consisted of 12 cataloguers with between 4 to 35 years of original cataloguing experience. Šauperl was interested in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive processes involved in subject cataloguing, including identification and interpretation of the topic of a document, and how cataloguers express the topic through subject headings and class numbers.

Joudrey (2005) was also interested in cognitive processes, but his qualitative study, which also employed talk-aloud and interviews, focussed exclusively on the stage of aboutness determination. In order to avoid the overlapping of stages observed in Šauperl's research, Joudrey employed LIS students with only a minimal understanding of information organization. His research, which was intended to provide insight into how humans analyze documents in aboutness determination, was conducted for the "purpose of developing a conceptual analysis model intended to inform teaching, research, and praxis" (Joudrey, 2005, p. 12).

Although this research shares some similarities with that of Šauperl and Joudrey, the primary distinction relates to their emphasis on examining cognitive processes for the purpose of understanding how respective tasks are accomplished. Although cognitive

process is not excluded from this research, it is not the primary focus directing the flow of events. Examining lived experience may also involve other aspects of the human experience, including emotional, physical, and/or spiritual. The research question also differs significantly. Šauperl and Joudrey are concerned with understanding "how" certain processes occur, whereas this research is interested in understanding "what it is like." By understanding what something is like, there is the possibility to "enter into" the experience.

Nature of the study

To understand cataloguers' lived experience of aboutness determination, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research was employed. Van Manen (2007) states that "phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. To say the same thing differently: phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld - the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (p. 9). Phenomenological research is not, strictly speaking, a method of research so much as a philosophical framework directed by the aim of being presuppositionless. Any method or technique employed in phenomenology must be guided by this pursuit. The hermeneutic aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology implies interpretation. It is based on the premise that any rendering of meaning derived from the descriptions is an interpretive act. Since an interpreter brings preconceptions to a phenomenon, she is asked to cultivate a sense of awareness that acknowledges her preconceptions and questions and challenges them in the light of what is presented.

To gather lived experience from cataloguers, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three professional cataloguers from academic, public, and cooperative library organizations. Interview questions were open-ended with the purpose of gathering descriptive accounts of the cataloguer's lifeworld. There was also a talk-aloud/observational component where the cataloguer was asked to analyse a resource in pursuit of its aboutness, and to talk aloud their decision-making. The talk-aloud/observation was intended to provide access to this invisible process in which the cataloguer relates to the resource in aboutness determination. The hermeneutic component of the study was most stimulated through the analysis of the descriptions and in writing the results.

Research question

The following research questions will be explored in this study:

- **What is the lived experience of cataloguers in aboutness determination?**
- **What is it like for cataloguers performing aboutness determination?**
- **What are the essential qualities of experience?**

In steadfast consideration of these research questions, it is possible to follow Husserl's first directive to phenomenology to return to the "things themselves."

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an outline of aboutness and related concepts as they have been presented in the LIS literature. The majority of the literature consulted in this review was located in the literature review of Daniel Joudrey's (2005) dissertation, "Building puzzles and growing pearls: A qualitative exploration of determining aboutness," as well as two articles not presented by Joudrey, but considered additionally important. Joudrey's review was chosen based on its focussed examination into the nature of aboutness and the conceptual analysis processes involved in the determination of aboutness. The relatively recent publication of his dissertation made it possible to examine a broad range of accessible literature, both contemporary and classic. Reference to Joudrey's literature review, however, is not exhaustive. Textbooks were not employed due to their pedagogical structure in presenting established concepts. As well, some texts are neglected in this review because they did not prove useful, or do not fall within the realm of its boundaries. For example, Joudrey presents numerous references to works related to facet analysis. Despite the fact that facet analysis has made significant contributions within LIS, it is not within the parameters of this review to present a detailed exposition on the topic. Rather the focus remains as a broad analysis of aboutness, as opposed to an exposition on specific systems.

Aboutness

While the term *about* is commonly employed among speakers, the term aboutness is less common. This may have to do with a certain *je ne sais quoi* or abstract condition

of the word. To explain, the term is constructed of the preposition, about, followed by the suffix, -ness. A preposition is commonly used to link or demonstrate relationships between other words in a sentence (e.g. the book is *about* cats). A preposition is generally followed by a determiner, which is exemplified above as "cats". As well, prepositions are generally difficult to define because they are not used in isolation. Although the word about is frequently used at the end of a sentence, it is often in the form of a question (i.e. What is the book about?). When the suffix –ness is added to the preposition, about, the preposition becomes an abstract noun and refers to a quality or condition of being about something (Oxford English Dictionary, aboutness). Thus, the example above becomes: the aboutness of the book is cats; or the book's aboutness is cats. While this example appears somewhat clumsy, H.H. Joachim (1906) in "The Nature of Truth iv 174," provides a rather more eloquent application of the term:

> Knowledge, so far as that is judgement and inference, is primarily and explicitly thinking 'about' an Other. And even though discursive thought may find its concentrated fulfilment in immediate or intuitive knowledge, its character of 'Aboutness' is not thereby eliminated.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary online (OED) (2011), Joachim (1906) is credited as being the first to coin this term, and his application of the term in the example above is synonymous with the definition provided in the OED.

Aboutness in LIS

It may be a simple matter of convenience that the term aboutness was drawn into the library science community. After all, it is difficult to talk about about because of its

prepositional nature. By converting the preposition to a noun, it becomes possible to describe it, despite it being an abstraction. In other words, as a noun, aboutness is "capable of functioning as the subject and direct object in a sentence, and as the object of a preposition" (OED, 2011, noun). Converting this preposition to a noun may, however, only create a semblance of precision. In reality, the term is fraught with numerous contradicting definitions as scholars and librarians attempt to grapple with this abstraction in application and theory.

Joudrey (2005), himself, claims that the movement towards the use of the term aboutness in LIS literature relates to its being more "pragmatic" and "practice-oriented" (p. 3) in definition. He makes a distinction between the terms *subject* and *aboutness*. Due to its "richer and longer history" (p. 3) the term subject, is riddled with complexities and ambiguities that relate to its use within the philosophical and literary theoretical realms. "Thus", he explains, "it is not difficult to leap from the term subject to the related but more philosophical terms: *meaning, understanding, interpretation,* and *idea*" (p. 3).

Metcalfe (1973) also comments on the unsatisfactory use of the term subject in LIS because of "conflicts and confusions of meaning, particularly with distinctions of general and specific, and of object and aspect" (p. 336).

Bruza, Wong, and Song (2000) suggest that the notion of aboutness is present in everyday communications, and plays a prominent role in information retrieval. Their research contributes to the evidence, however, that aboutness is an incomplete concept, and their article attempts to symbolically identify aboutness and nonaboutness properties that are useful and relevant in information retrieval.

Hjørland (2001) does not share Joudrey or Metcalfe's perspective. He states that the "concept of aboutness did not remove this inherent unclarity, it only changed its name" (p. 774). Likewise, Albrechtsen (1993) states that the previous vagueness surrounding the term subject was eventually transferred to the term aboutness. Rather, says Hjørland, "we should regard subject (including the compound subject matter) and aboutness as synonymous concepts (and prefer the former). The subject of a document is that 'something' that subject analysis and retrieval are supposed to identify. This is closely related to the questions that a document should provide answers to" (p. 776).

Hjørland (2001) attempts to find a theoretical basis for defining synonymous terms that are not "biased towards any specific kind of IR-system" (p. 775). "If we are going to compare different approaches and develop general theories of information science and information retrieval," says Hjørland, "we have to develop concepts that do not give priority to certain kinds of systems at the expense of others" (p. 775). For Hjørland, it is the theoretical basis behind the usage of terms like aboutness that defines them. He examines the most important terms that are used both synonymously and in distinction from one another. These include: *subject* (subject matter; subject-predicate); *aboutness*; *topic* (topicality; topic/comment); *theme* (with central theme and the German *leitmotiv*); *domain* (cognitive domain, scientific domain); *field* (information field, field of knowledge, field of research); *content*; and *information* (p. 775).

Also in contrast to Joudrey's claim that the term aboutness is free of ambiguities, Swift, Winn, and Bramer (1978) suggest that the notion of aboutness is far from clear, despite the fact that it forms the basis for models of indexing. The problem with the application of aboutness as an indexing model relates to their view that aboutness

statements are usually oversimplified, and rarely describe the complexities surrounding searches carried out within the social sciences. They call instead for a multi-modal approach that involves characterising documents in a way that will serve a variety of search formulations. Their multi-modal system is a means to achieve a small-scale approach to indexing that acknowledges specific needs within specific disciplines, such as the social sciences and education.

Hutchins (1976) states "that the subject description is merely one form of expression of some part of what the document is about" (p. 2). He distinguishes between *subject description* and *topics*. Topics act as a summarization of a document's content for purposes of information retrieval and are based on references to relationships within a particular textual context. "In isolation a word has a sense, but it has no actual referent; it can have a referent only in a particular context" (p. 2). While subject descriptions, as exhorted by Hutchins, act as isolated parts, topics function within a particular context.

Aboutness as a two-type distinction

The term aboutness was first coined in the LIS literature by Robert Fairthorne (1969). Fairthorne (1969) bifurcates aboutness into two types: *extensional aboutness* and *intensional aboutness*. Fairthorne's two "camps" of aboutness distinguish between what is inherent in the document (extensional aboutness), and what is inferred from it (intensional aboutness). The former is fixed, stable, and unchanging, while the latter is meaning-based, fluctuating, and subject to interpretation. Extensional aboutness is sometimes considered the concern of the indexer, and some would argue that it is the indexer's purpose is to extract the document's innate aboutness without interpolation of

bias, subjective meaning, or interpretation. Intensional aboutness implies a relationship between the inanimate resource and the user engaged with its content. As a result, meaning is derived. Since users come to resources from various perspectives and for various purposes, the interpretations and meanings drawn from a resource will be from numerous vantage points.

Fairthorne's two types of aboutness can be found in the literature under different headings. Beghtol (1986) recognizes two kinds of document aboutness, but names them *aboutness* and *meaning* to create a more overt distinction in terminology. Joudrey (2005) supports the distinction between extensional and intensional aboutness, and uses the terms *aboutness* and *subject* to distinguish the two.

Boyce (1982) uses the terms *topicality* and *informativeness* from a two-stage view of relevance and the retrieval process. While considered "operationally necessary," (p. 106) topicality is considered an insufficient condition for user based relevance. It may or may not serve user relevance judgements. Informativeness, however, is based on the premise that the knowledge acquired from information retrieval is both "understandable and novel" (p. 106). While Boyce's two stages relate to Fairthorne's two types of aboutness, his description of informativeness is also similar to Hutchins's (1977) notion of *theme* and *rheme*, which is based on the idea that documents consist of a general knowledge base supplemented by an exposition of something new. Theme and rheme will be discussed in more detail ahead.

Some argue against the concepts of extensional and intensional aboutness. Todd (1992) challenges the notion of a document's permanent aboutness. He argues that the

low measure of inter-indexer consistency in subject determination does not support the view of extensional aboutness. Wilson (1968), too, demonstrates the indeterminacy and elusive nature surrounding the notion of subjects. He argues that we "cannot expect to find one absolutely precise description of one thing which is *the* description of *the* subject" (p. 90). Wilson's approach to the notion of subject will also be explored in greater detail later in this review.

Mai (1999), who does not talk specifically about the distinct types of aboutness, offers an alternative perspective by challenging the notion that words and their meanings can be separated. Instead, he argues that language is not merely words pointing to an objective reality, but is defined by the discourse of the "people or the community in which the words are used" (p. 553). Therefore, knowledge organization is more concerned with the "interpretive process" and "the cultural and social context which the knowledge organization is a part of" (p. 555). Merrell (1995) says that "classifications are never innocent but constantly streaked with arbitrariness and motivated by preconceptions and prejudices. Besides they are constantly shifting, whether by design or in spite of our efforts to capture them" (p. 92). In other words, neutral and objective knowledge organization is a "pie in the sky", merely a fanciful idea that is impossible to attain.

As a premise to their research, Bertrand-Gastaldy, Lanteigne, Giroux, and David (1995) claim that "all reading is subjective and oriented in terms of a project" (p. 15). Similar to Mai's social construction, Bertrand-Gastaldy et al. assert that reading is both an individual and a social act of interpretation. As a social act, reading reflects certain shared characteristics among individuals within their respective communities. Reading as

an individual act reflects instances of differences between individuals within their communities which are based on their goals and needs.

If indexers are considered members of a specific community, it becomes possible to study the shared characteristics of their readings of a document for the purpose of indexing, as well as to examine individual deviations or differences within the community.

Campbell (2000) asserts that the knowledge organization community has become sceptical of the idea that a document has an intrinsic aboutness, and concurs with Mai (1999) that knowledge organization is a social construction. As a result, knowledge organization has come to embrace multiplicity and community-identity, while acknowledging that previous notions of universal neutrality were in fact laced with cultural bases and bias. By admitting to the problem of bias, knowledge organizers will inevitably look to communities (such as the gay and lesbian communities) for their response to updated vocabularies and classifications. However, this approach does not leave indexes and classification schemes free from further scrutiny. Campbell explains:

The makers of new classification systems will be expected to articulate their positions relative to the community for whom the system is designed. This position will make a fundamental part of the tool's nature, and will be the means whereby readers, users, and critics of the system will rebel, and find their own provisional categories (p. 129).

Even as organization systems endeavour to include a multiplicity of communities within their systems, contentions can and do arise within those same communities as to

how they understand themselves in relation to the labels used to define them. This fits with Bertrand-Gastaldy et al.'s (1995) assertion that reading is both an individual and a social construction. In other words, the idea of universality within communities is itself a myth. As Campbell says, "categories are fluid and unstable" (p. 130). This does not negate the importance of acknowledging the concerns of communities. Rather, "that the tough questions are here to stay, and that complexity, debate and controversy can be negotiated, but not banished" (Campbell, 2000, p. 130).

While Joudrey (2005) acknowledges the validity of the "subjective, interpretivist viewpoint" his acknowledgement is cast off with a statement that the "work of subject analysis must continue to be done", and that "those arguing against the concept of extensional aboutness appear to be embracing an extreme view of relativism, one that is ultimately untenable for information organization" (p. 58). His assertion suggests that the rejection of extensional aboutness is a mere philosophical musing that has no place in the "real" world. Joudrey's statements seem fractional, incomplete, and complacent. To acknowledge the subjective and social constructs that inform knowledge organization is to work within the confines of an ever-changing reality. This reality is not built of absolutes waiting to be discovered and applied in the completion of what was once incomplete. Rather, it is recognition that organizational processes are themselves temporary and unstable precisely because the language and societies within which they function are also of this nature.

Aboutness from the user perspective

In addition to supporting the notion of extensional and intensional aboutness, Wellisch (1996) extends the discussion by bringing in Fairthorne (1971) and Lancaster's (1991) call to consider not only what the document is about, but its intended use. He uses the term *aboutness* to describe the conceptual analysis of a document from a" two principal criteria – what does it mention and for whom is it intended?" (p. 7). Topics are assigned following the aboutness determination process which is based on the response to the questions above. For Wellisch, relevance is an additional consideration in the selection of topics, especially in the case of depth indexing. The indexer must ask, is this "relevant to the aboutness of the document…and will this statement, fact, issue, problem, opinion or belief expressed in the text of the document be relevant to the prospective users of indexes" (p. 7). Wellisch's discussion of user relevance raises an important point in the discussion. The degree of depth in indexing relates to the level of specificity desired by index users. The indexer must have an idea about who the users of the database are to inform her decisions about relevance and specificity.

Maron (1977) examines the concept of *about* from its perspective within information retrieval. Maron identifies three types of about: *S-about (*subjective about); *O-about* (objective about); and *R-about* (retrieval about). S-about is defined as "a relationship between a document and the resulting inner experience of its reader" (p. 41). In other words, for S-about to be successful, a document's aboutness must relate to the reader's personal experience of it. S-about is a complex psychological concept that "cannot be examined further in objective terms" (p. 41). O-about, however, is based on observable, individual behaviour, and "refers to the (actual or potential) behaviour of

asking or searching for writings. It is the external correlate of S-about because it would be actually (or potentially) observable by an external observer in a retrieval situation" (p. 41). R-about relates to the observable behaviour of groups or classes of individuals, such as a group of people with who actively engage with an information retrieval system, in contrast to individual behaviour observed through the notion of O-about. It is based on the probability that what a group of users find most relevant within a given document is the term or concept most likely to be used in searching. In others words, a document is about dragonflies if most of the people who found it relevant used the term dragonflies during their search.

Albrechtsen (1993) advocates a requirements-oriented approach to subject analysis. The focus of the requirements-oriented approach is based on the intent to convey the knowledge of the document to those who may be interested or find it useful. In other words, the document is analysed for the potential knowledge it offers to prospective groups of users. The ability of indexers to predict or forecast user behaviour and to determine the priority of subjects based on supposition is indeed a tricky assignment. Regardless, Albrechtsen argues that indexers should pick-up the "challenges posed by the social and cultural reality within which we operate…new frameworks like requirements-oriented approaches have potentials for supporting a broad and open transfer of knowledge, which is a primary responsibility of our profession" (p. 223).

User based approaches to aboutness determination are inherently problematic. While librarians do have a certain knowledge surrounding their community of users, they cannot know the full extent of information use, nor can they be certain of when individuals deviate from standard user behaviour within their respective communities.

Still, user based approaches provide challenges that present great opportunities for information interaction. Indexers are presented with the opportunities to move beyond "modest, value-free ethics for dissemination of knowledge" towards a "new consciousness of the impact of our profession for mediating knowledge" (Albrechtsen, 1993, p. 223).

Theme and rheme

Another two-type distinction, borrowed from linguistics, and applied within LIS, is the notion of theme and rheme. Hutchins's (1977) article is frequently cited with reference to theme and rheme. The OED defines theme as "that part of a sentence that indicates what is being talked about," and rheme as "that part of a sentence or utterance giving new information about the theme" (OED, 2011, theme and rheme).

Hutchins offers a reading into the notion of aboutness within the context of text linguistics which is beyond the limits of this discussion. Of interest, however, is Hutchins's description of the problem of relevance, which relates to the "persistent and perhaps inherent conflict between what readers regards as the 'aboutness' of a document and what indexers define as its 'aboutness'" (p. 34). Readers are interested in what is new to them in a document, whereas indexers are concerned with the "given framework… For the reader, relevance is a function of his current interests and his personal 'state of knowledge'; for the indexer, relevance is a function of the place of the document in the current 'state of knowledge' as a whole" (p. 34). Hutchins concludes that the indexer can only concern herself with those parts of the document that form the "knowledge base upon which the writer builds the 'new' information she tends to convey" (p.34).

Akin to the notion of theme and rheme is Weinberg's (1988) discussion surrounding the concepts, *aboutness* and *aspect*. Weinberg claims that indexing fails the scholar or researcher because it places its emphasis on aboutness while neglecting aspect. To better explain, she compares aboutness and aspect to their linguistic analogs, *topic* and *comment.* Topics are defined as "subjects of discourse", while comment as "that part of the utterance that adds something new" (Weinberg, 1988, p.4). Weinberg claims that topics are particularly relevant for the student or general reader looking for information on a given subject. The scholar or researcher, however, is rarely in need of topical information. Rather, she seeks content that comments on a particular aspect of a given topic. Through repeated observation, Weinberg has observed that scholars rarely use subject indexes because they lack aspectual perspective.

Hutchins (1978) also distinguishes between two types of document need. The first concerns the reader who is interested in acquiring information on a specific topic that she may know nothing or very little about. Her need is based on satisfying a basic understanding of a subject. The second type concerns readers who are already well-versed in a subject, but are looking for a new approach or perspective on it. Both share the need for something new within the information they seek, but the first type is looking for something foundational, while the second pre-supposes a certain level of knowledge, that while the information may speak to that level of knowledge, it also offers something new.

Weinberg's unsatisfied subjects, however, would likely not be fulfilled with Hutchins's suggestion for indexing. What Hutchins suggests is a "definition of the 'aboutness' of documents which is formulated in terms of the knowledge presupposed by

the authors of the texts" (p. 178). Hutchins lays the burden of expressing the newness of a document onto abstracting services since the use of summarization provides a greater opportunity to inform users in greater detail as to what the author has had to say on a particular topic.

The notion of subject

Joudrey's (2005) argument was that the term subject was riddled with complexity as a result of its longstanding position within the philosophical and literary realms. While it is true that in the OED the term subject clearly has a greater list of definitions and historical references, it remains unclear whether the complexities are thereby eliminated by changing the reference to the term aboutness.

To accept, or to not accept, the distinction between aboutness and subject, while certainly a noteworthy debate, is not the intention here. Rather this review seeks to provide a examination of aboutness in the LIS literature, and the distinction between terms is merely one of several discussions in the literature. To neglect the notion of subject because of disputes in terminology would be to do injustice to the literature. Therefore the following section provides an overview of the notion of subject within the literature. In some examples, the notion of subject is intricately linked to the practice of subject determination. For that reason, the following discussion will also include details on various approaches to subject determination as a manner of understanding the notion of subject.

Ranganathan (2006) discusses the notion of subject as an "organized or systematized body of ideas, whose extension and intension are likely to fall coherently

within the field of interest and comfortably within the intellectual competence and the field of inevitable specialization of a normal individual" (p. 82). Ranganathan's definition falls very much within the framework of his classification, and the term is broken down further into *basic subject*, *compound subject, complex subject, micro* and *macro subjects*, and *spot subject*.

According to the Classification Research Group (CRG) (1955) the notion of subject as a simple isolated concept or theme "that can be neatly tucked away in a single pigeon-hole in the vast cabinet of knowledge" is insufficient (p. 139). Rather, according to the group, it is a compound of simpler concepts. They explain that co-ordinate indexing systems and analytico-synthetic classification schemes recognize the compound nature of subject, the former by listing multiple subject terms in reference to one another, and the latter by use of classification symbols which form an aggregate of the one subject.

Reynolds (1989) also discusses the inadequacy of the "pigeonhole" approach to subject determination that attempts, through various clues such as table of contents, title, and summary statements, to find an overall theme and where it fits into the subject. She states the ability to do so depends, not only on the work, but also on the reader (indexer). From a subjectivist perspective she states:

> We like to think that the text conveys a message, but that is only part true. Readers (or cataloguers) project their own perceptions, experiences, and level of comprehension onto the text. Each reading experience, even by the same

person, is unique. There is always a degree of tension between the new information and what the reader already knows or believes (p. 232).

In an attempt to find a subject cataloguing code, Reynolds (1989) acknowledges the need for it to have a theoretical basis, not simply a list of arbitrary procedures and rules. For this theoretical basis to be useful, however, it must be put to good use. At the same time, she claims the near impossibility of establishing such a code given that subjects are defined by individual perceptions that we can neither fully understand, nor describe. Despite, and in fact, given, the elusive nature of subjects, she suggests we re-evaluate the use of concepts such as *relevance* and *specificity* because their current role within subject determination is limited. In other words, is it possible to define specificity within a variety of contexts, or to discard the notion of relevance given the unpredictability of future information needs?

In response, it can be said that the terms are themselves not fixed, but function within a milieu of potentialities. Seeking to find a stable definition of a term such as relevance in all circumstances is, as Donovan Leitch (1965) aptly said, like "trying to catch the wind". The concepts that surround subject cataloguing must be malleable if we aim to eliminate philosophical frustration.

Hjørland (1992) takes on the task, considered elusive by Reynolds, of investigating the theoretical notion of subject and subject matter as it has been used in LIS. He argues that an explicit investigation into the theoretical underpinnings is necessary in order to understand the process of subject determination. He explores five epistemological positions surrounding the concept of subject: *the naïve conception;*

subjective idealism; objective idealism; the pragmatic concept of subject matter; and a *realist/materialist subject theory*. It is evident in Hjørland's examination, that the notion of subject is affected by the epistemological framework through which subject analysis takes place. In order to illustrate, a brief description of each is provided.

The naïve conception is not particularly burdened by the notion of subject, but understands subjects to be fairly obvious. There are gradations within the naïve conception, as Hjørland talks about "a slightly less naïve viewpoint" that "would recognise that there need not be a correspondence between for example, the title of the book and its actual subject" (p. 172). Still, the naïve view-point does not "differentiate between linguistic forms and meanings" (p. 173).

Idealism is a fundamental philosophical tenet that claims that what exists in the mental realm is of greater consequence, or serves as a primary function and determinant of the external, material world. From this perspective, the concept of subject is first an idea, whether in a subjective or an objective sense. Therefore, subjective idealism is concerned with points of view, whether they are from the author, reader, or indexer, while objective idealism takes the position that ideas, or subjects, are, in fact, objective realities with universal or fixed properties.

The pragmatic concept is concerned with the notion of subject based on the needs of users. The concept of subject is applied within the practical realm, anticipating the varying user requirements. "User-oriented or need-oriented indexing is a description of a subject which must be perceived as the relation between the properties of a document and a real or anticipated user need" (p. 180).

The last theory presented by Hjørland, and the one he appears to endorse, is the realist/materialist subject theory, which is based on the "viewpoint that things exist objectively and encompass objective properties" (p. 181). Similar to the pragmatic theory, the materialist theory suggests that the extent to which subjects represent the potential of documents will have an effect on "optimising the potential perception of the document" (p. 185). In contrast, however, realistic and materialistic theory has as its aim to penetrate the "innermost essence" of reality, so that subjects represent the "general and the significant aspects of reality" (p. 185). Thus a subject description of a document is, in one way or another, an expression of the epistemological potentials of the document. The better the description predicts the potentials of the document, the more correct, more objective, the description of the subject is.

While Hjørland's examination may appear to abide within the philosophical realm, his investigation is applicable to the discussion of subject analysis because it raises to the forefront the epistemological positions that influence the process of subject determination. As Hjørland says, "a very close connection exists between what subjects are, and how we are to know them" (p. 172).

According to Langridge (1989), there is a greater need for precision surrounding the term subject. He claims that the term subject has been used exclusively in what are invariably two distinct senses. These two distinct meanings are related to the following two questions asked of a work: "What is it?" and "What is it about?" (p. 9). The first question is answered by reference to what Langridge terms *forms of knowledge*, which may include history, philosophy, music, science, and so on. The second question is answered by observable facts or events, known as phenomena. Langridge employs the

term *topic* to describe this approach. He clarifies the distinction between forms of knowledge and topics based on their aims and methods. To explain further:

> Philosophy aims to clarify by examining beliefs, science to reveal natural laws, criticism to evaluate, technology to facilitate production. There are very obvious differences between such forms of knowledge, ways of looking at the world, and the topics they discuss, such as morals, animals, symphonies and steam engines (p. 31).

Wilson (1968) is an important contributor in the discussion surrounding aboutness determination and the concept of subject. His discourse on subject determination is concerned with the movement from understanding the parts of a writing to knowing what the writing is about as a whole. He outlines four possible methods in the determination of subject, and as a result, demonstrates the complexities surrounding the notion of subject. Usefully, his exposition of each method also describes the potential problems and deficiencies therein.

The first he calls the "purposive way", which relates to the identification of the author's purpose in writing. In some cases the author's intentions are clearly outlined, but in other instances may require a detailed examination in order to be deciphered. There are problems with both approaches. The author may misrepresent her purpose, fail to express her purpose, or fail to achieve a definite purpose. The analysis may also be thwarted in attempts at finding a primary purpose to the writing. Writings may, in fact, be constructed of subjects independent of one another, and "recognition of those (independent aims) requires an ability to see which of the things done or attempted in the writing are done

only because necessary as a means to an end, and which are done 'for their own sake'"
(p. 80).

His second approach is known as the "figure ground" way. This approach is based on the idea that there is dominant subject in a writing which "stands out" or is "most emphasized" (p. 82). The problems herein apply to the argument surrounding what constitutes the dominant subject. Wilson explains, "dominance is not simple omnipresence; what we recognize as dominant is what captures or dominates our attention, but we cannot expect that everyone's attention will be dominated by the same things" (p. 83).

Again, Wilson offers another approach to subject determination, this one based on the notion that dominance can be determined from an objective stand-point. More specifically explained, the objective way involves counting references to items within the writing. It is an objective correlate to the notion of dominance. However, Wilson is quick to contend, the objective way is plagued with the problem that the item most frequently represented may not be the dominant subject of the writing, but rather background. As well, the primary concept might be signified in various ways, or may not be expressed concretely within the writing. In fact, says Wilson:

> One can always rewrite a text in such a way as to reduce the number of references to any item and increase the number of references to any other without materially altering the general sense of the writing or even, if one were skilful enough, changing the balance of impressions of dominance and subordination (p. 83).

Wilson's final method is based on the "appeal to unity" (p. 86). For a work to hold together, there must be something that binds it; that holds it together; that makes it complete. The binding component is based on that which is necessary versus that which is dispensable in the writing. Once again, Wilson is forthright in his acknowledgement of the problems of this ideal. Afterall, not all writers attain unified writings. In certain circumstances this may be the result of a certain deficiency in ability, but in other cases, the writer may lack a subject simply because questions are left unanswered. Wilson explains that our efforts to take the unified whole, what he calls the "Cast of Characters", and extract one subject from the cast may not reveal what the subject really is, but "may result in a piece of artistry on our [librarians'] part, rather than on the part of the writer" (p. 88).

In conclusion, Wilson argues that "the notion of the subject is indeterminate" (p. 89). He acknowledges that things are what they are, but that descriptions are vague, nebulous, and inexact. While there can be incorrect descriptions, there are also no perfect descriptions of the subject. "The uniqueness implied in our constant talk of *the* subject is non-existent" (p. 90). Therefore, the position that a writing is given in an organizational scheme is based on the methods used to determine its subject. It is possible to deduce that items positioned in subject proximity share some characteristic in common. This does not suggest that these writings belong exclusively within selected positions. On the contrary, the indeterminacy surrounding the notion of subject means that their assignment is not definite. Thus, "the place has no definite sense" (Wilson, 1968, p. 91).

What is particularly revelatory in Wilson's analysis is his demonstration of the flaws inherent in each of his methods. He does not attempt to hide the defects, nor "brush

them under the table" as though insignificant. Rather, his four methods illustrate the impossibility of finding the perfect subject through the perfect method. At no point, however, does Wilson suggest that the search for methodologies is in vain. After all, he, himself, provides four approaches to subject determination. Instead, Wilson's exposition suggests that there is great benefit in understanding what is insufficient in our methods and impossible in our attempts.

Stages in organization

According to ISO 5963-1985, there are, in fact, three stages to indexing. They are:

a) Examining the document and establishing the subject content;

b) identifying the principal concepts present in the subject;

c) expressing these concepts in the terms of the indexing language (p. 2).

Perhaps it is for the sake of convenience and analysis that these stages are identified as three separate processes within this International Standard. Ranganathan (2006) also discusses the notion of stages in what he calls "the three planes of a work" (p. 327). Ranganathan's three planes are known as the *ideas plane;* the *verbal plane*; and the *notation plane*, and share similarities with ISO 5963-1985.

While ISO 5963-1985 acknowledges that these processes may overlap, they do not concern themselves with the influence of intersection between stages. Ranganathan does acknowledge the potential influence that may take place between the planes, although he also claims that it is possible to separate the three planes. Of course, Ranganathan is working within the framework of his own particular system, while ISO

5963-1985 is providing guidelines for indexing as a general phenomenon, thus making it difficult to deal with too many specifics.

While it is not within the realm of this review to examine this issue in great detail, it is certainly an area that requires additional research, for it is indeed rare for processes so closely connected to be separable without some degree of influence, unless, of course, purposefully calculated. The following section illustrates research performed in one or more stages of the ISO 8963-1985. In this literature review, a link is made between ISO 5963-1985 and the research presented herein.

Joudrey's (2005) dissertation research focuses on the conceptual analysis processes involved in aboutness determination. His research was set forth for the purpose of finding clues into how humans analyze documents to determine aboutness. According to him, there is a distinction between conceptual analysis and subject analysis, for the latter involves both the conceptual analysis stage and the translation process.

Joudrey expected to find patterns emerging in the conceptual analysis processes of his subjects, as well as the use of bibliographic, content, or visual features such as table of contents, chapter headings, titles, illustrations, and so on. He makes a distinction between the processes involved in aboutness determination and the bibliographic features used in conceptual analysis. The distinction appears to relate to the first two stages presented in ISO 5963-1985. The first stage involves an examination of various features of the work, followed by the analytical processes involved in the identification of concepts.

Reynolds (1989) makes a similar distinction between the mental processes involved in aboutness determination and the examination of clues provided in the work advocated by cataloguing texts. Wilson, too, comments on the manuals of library practice that outline common recommendations in the examination of a work to determine its subject. These manuals, "full of references to 'the subject' of a writing", are "curiously uninformative about how one goes about identifying the subject of a writing" (Wilson, 1968, p. 73). The examples above demonstrate an interest in moving from the application process to the intellectual process as a manner of understanding what informs decision-making.

Understanding how cataloguers determine or identify topics and select appropriate subject descriptions was also the basis for Šauperl's (1999) dissertation research. The background to her research was based on the lack of illumination surrounding the cognitive processes involved in identifying the topic of a work followed by the selection of subject headings. Similar to Joudrey, Šauperl mentions that cataloguing manuals provide lists of parts of a work that should be consulted in the determination of subjects, but fail to address the selection process itself. In other words, cataloguing guidelines provide us with clues in the identification of topics, but do not explain how cataloguers select topics for subject representation. The goal of her research was to investigate the cognitive processes of topic identification and subject description from a holistic perspective. Research of this nature is concerned with the cognitive processes in information organization, and not merely in the application of applied techniques by catatonic cataloguers.

Although not the basis of her dissertation research, nonetheless, Šauperl did indeed observe the overlapping of the three stages mentioned above, particularly with respect to the last two stages. In fact, Šauperl's samples were found to have selected tentative headings following an examination of the document, and to have applied these headings through a search of titles or subject headings, followed by an analysis of the search results to determine the appropriateness of the subject headings in relation to the tentative headings. In other words, her observations revealed that the identification and translation processes were not conducted separately. As noted by Šauperl, this approach "is sensible in terms of collocation" but may be problematic "in the assumption that all the documents described with the same subject heading or a set of subject headings actually address the same topic" (p. 255).

Šauperl's samples seem to exemplify Hickey's (1976) claim that American librarians have no clear philosophy surrounding the issue of subject control, in part due to their reliance on lists of headings and classificatory divisions that are centrally issued and updated. Hickey says that "since the Library of Congress has only infrequently published any official explanation of the principles underlying the maintenance of its list and schemes, it is not surprising that most librarians are unable to state with any assurance the basis for selection of subject terms and classification symbols beyond the general rule of "specificity"" (p. 275). Hickey raises an important point in the discussion of aboutness, namely the issue of applying preferred terms that may not be explicitly defined or understood by the cataloguer. As well, the preferred terms themselves may be insufficient in their descriptions of the contents. There is indeed a problem in applying the preferred

term, feminism, to a work written from a feminist perspective. The two are clearly not the

same thing (Olson, personal correspondence, July 20, 2011).

In a similar manner to Joudrey (2005), Chu and O'Brien's (1993) study focuses

on the initial process of subject analysis, which involves analysing the text and

expressing the subjects in natural language. Their study did not include the translation

stage from natural language to indexing terms so as to not hinder the analytical process

by the act of trying to fit terms into a controlled setting. Considering the activities of

Šauperl's samples, it was intuitive of Chu and O'Brien to neglect the translation stage.

Interestingly, their investigation revealed that bibliographic elements were a

major factor in determining aboutness, but that the level of difficulty in using these

elements depended in great part on the discipline of the resource. For example,

bibliographic elements for texts within the humanities, (their study employed documents

in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences), were much less factual than the

sciences, and, as a result, more difficult to decipher subject content. Another point of

interest relates to the difficulty participants had in isolating primary and secondary topics.

Their problems related to the issue of prioritisation, as some texts seem to have two

subjects of equal priority, especially within the sciences. This observation fits with

Wilson's (1968) discussion of dominance, and the problems associated with determining

one dominant subject over another. As well, their research suggests that subject analysis

carries different issues based on the discipline of the subject being analysed. It begs

further investigation into the study of the conceptual analysis process as it applies within

varying disciplines. The rules that guide one may not be suitable for another. In other

words, "one size may not fit all".

Research in the cognitive structure of classification by Hovi (1988) demonstrates that classifiers most commonly approach a document from a theme-oriented approach, and references to other parts of the text, such as its newness, or to the user and his/her purpose with the text were less common. Her samples were nearly unanimous in the determination of a book's main subjects. Hovi does not question the unanimity of the theme-oriented approach to aboutness determination by her subjects, but is more interested in the influence that classification systems can have on the conceptualization of the subjects derived from a book. Her research, which included all three stages, was predominantly concerned with the translation stage. She explains that "in spite of the fact that the classifiers were unanimous about the main subjects of the books, they picked up the "important concepts" in different ways according to the classification system" (p. 130). Hovi's research, like Šauperl's, is significant because it demonstrates that the movement between stages is not necessarily a linear one. For Hovi's participants, the classification system influenced the selection of important concepts. From the researcher's perspective this suggests that the systems may not be serving analysis, but defining it.

Concluding the literature review

The literature examined here is useful for understanding how the LIS community has grappled with aboutness determination and related concepts and practices. Although there is no definitive answer to the problems of aboutness determination, it is just as well to understand that they exist, in theory and in practice, in order to be better equipped in relating to cataloguers involved in aboutness determination. For the research proposed herein, the goal will be to move beyond theory and into actual experience, while at the

same time recognising that cataloguers are not divorced from the concepts and practices

that shape their professions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

As described in the introduction, this research is a hermeneutic phenomenological study of the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination. Beyond an interest in applying hermeneutic phenomenology in a research context, there are a few additional reasons why it was employed here. Firstly, the experience is a shared one. It is both shared among participants and shared through descriptive elucidation. Of course, quantity is not of the essence as much as depth. A small sample is suitable to garner meaningful results. Secondly, although there is a moderate amount of highly theoretical literature that examines the topic of aboutness, and some applied research, there is no research to date that looks at the cataloguer's lived experience of the phenomenon using hermeneutic phenomenology. To come to an understanding of lived experience a reduction is required. The reduction involves a conscious acknowledgement of the theories and presuppositions that prevent one from seeing the phenomenon as it is. This acknowledgement does not involve conflicted restraint, but awareness and suspension. Merleau-Ponty (1964) explains:

> The philosopher, in so far as he is a philosopher, ought not to think like the
> external man, the psychophysical subject who is *in* time, *in* space, *in* society, as an
> object is in a container. From the mere fact that he desires not only to exist but to
> exist with an understanding of what he does, it follows that he must suspend the
> affirmations which are implied in the given facts of his life. But to suspend them

is not to deny them, and even less to deny the link which binds us to the physical, social, and cultural world. It is on the contrary to *see* this link, to become conscious of it. It is the 'phenomenological reduction' alone, which reveals this ceaseless and implicit affirmation, this 'setting of the world' which is presupposed at every moment of our thought (p. 49).

It is through the cataloguer's descriptions that access to lived experience is provided. Descriptions alone, however, are insufficient; "in the eidetic reduction one needs to see past or through the particularity of lived experience towards the universal, essence or *eidos* that lie on the other side of the concreteness of lived meaning" (van Manen, 2007, p. 185). This allows one to understand the experience in a deeper manner; moving beyond description towards fundamental qualities that make the experience what it is.

The hermeneutic component of hermeneutic phenomenology must also be addressed. Hermeneutic phenomenology presupposes an interpreter; one who actively engages with the descriptions in an attempt to render meaning. Hermeneutics begins with what is shared. Awareness is required so that preconceptions and foreknowledge do not impose an unexamined bias on the experience. Gadamer explains:

"… a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to try and tell him something … But this kind of sensitivity involves neither neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 26).

The sensitivity that Gadamer alludes to is a requisite to phenomenology because of the interest in experience as it is. The interpretive process of engaging with the descriptions involves both "getting into the cataloguer's skin," as well as standing outside of the descriptions in a state of questioning and curiosity. The analysis is further propelled by the need to elucidate and capture the essential qualities of experience. This is achieved through the interpretive process of writing.

Acquiring lived experience

How is it possible to capture the lived experiences of cataloguers during aboutness determination? Firstly, after obtaining permission to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I contacted supervisors and department heads at local institutions that employ professional cataloguers for permission to make contact with their cataloguers for the purpose of soliciting their participation, as well as to obtain permission to conduct the data gathering in the workplace. I was interested in speaking with cataloguers who do original cataloguing, as well as those who have, at least, a Master's in Library and Information Science. I received approval from two institutions to speak with their professional cataloguers onsite. A third institution was not willing to grant me access to their workplace, but was willing to share my request for participants with cataloguers should they agree to be interviewed at a location offsite.

To gather lived experience, I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three cataloguers, as well as a talk-aloud/observational component. The interviews were conducted for the purpose of gathering descriptions of experience. Since aboutness

determination is an internal process, the talk-aloud/observational component was employed to gather access to an inherently invisible process.

Professional cataloguers from several different library institutions were contacted, including public, academic, and cooperative services. It was determined beforehand that institutional practices and considerations should have no bearing on the results since the focus is on capturing the essential qualities of experience. It provided a meaningful challenge to look for shared themes beyond institutional reign. Cataloguers were contacted through e-mail, and were provided with a consent form, which gave a brief outline of the research goals, methodology, and data collection tools. Two of those interviews were conducted in the workplace and the other in the cataloguer's home. The physical space of the worksite was not particularly meaningful to the data collection, so the research was not compromised by meeting in the cataloguer's home. In fact, the interview conducted in the home was the most frank of the three, and it may be that, for future research, interviews offsite will elicit more forthright descriptions into the cataloguer's lifeworld.

The interviewees, who have been given the pseudonyms Irene, Stephen, and Allen, all had many years of cataloguing experience; Irene and Stephen have been cataloguing for over 10 years, and Allen for over twenty years. Irene works predominantly with rare books and Allen is a music specialist. Stephen works with more general resources. Although Allen had some initial concerns that his music specialization would be not be suitable to the research question, he had sufficient additional experience cataloguing textual resources that provided him with access to his experience of aboutness determination. Although certain aspects of his music specialization did

polarize his descriptions from the others, for example, the focus on form subject headings, he was able to bring in instances where aboutness was relevant when dealing with music, as well as with textual sources.

The interview schedule (see Appendix) consisted of six open-ended questions. Participants were not given the questions beforehand. The first two questions were developed to elicit some background information from the cataloguers and to allow them a chance to become comfortable speaking in the interview setting. The remaining four questions were specific to aboutness determination, and included prompts and probes in the event that the cataloguer did not understand or was going off topic. Interviewees were also asked to bring a resource or two of their choosing to the interview for the talk-aloud/observational component. Although I did ask each participant the six questions on the schedule, some of the descriptions provided prompted further questioning. I employed a mini-disk recorder to record the interviews, and a back-up tape recorder. Each interview was transcribed word-for-word, with some omission of irrelevant details. The interviews were between 60 - 120 minutes long, including the talk-aloud/observational component.

Analysing lived experience

The analysis was one of the most complex aspects of the project, especially in an attempt to move deeper into the descriptions, and took place in several stages, borrowing from the approach outlined in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012). It began with reading and re-reading each transcript and making initial comments below the interviewee's description. A table for each participant was then created that included the descriptions

and comments, prompting further analysis of emergent themes. A typed list of emergent themes was printed out and each theme cut separately, placed onto a poster board, and shuffled around to explore spatial representations of emergent themes in relation to one another. Themes that were in opposition to one another were placed at opposite ends of

the poster, and superordinate themes were attributed to each grouping. An additional table was created for each participant that included the superordinate themes, themes, page/line and keyword references to the interviews.

After each superordinate table was created, the three tables were spread out on a large surface and examined for patterns and connections across cases. Recurring themes were observed, and in some cases, themes were broadened to be inclusive of idiosyncratic instances while still sharing higher order qualities. A master table was created of superordinate and ordinate themes from the group. At this point, the analysis was complete, and writing of the results began.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings presented here are a reflective interpretation of the descriptions

shared by three professional cataloguers. In an attempt to give shape and meaning to the

lifeworld of the cataloguer in aboutness determination, the findings have been assigned

three superordinate theme headings. They are: "Aboutness as encounter," "Fashioned by

the structure," and "Acting as intermediate agent." These superordinate themes act as

broad headings and are further narrowed and refined to reflect more specific thematic

aspects of the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination.

Aboutness as encounter

An encounter is defined as "a meeting with a person or thing, especially a casual,

unexpected or brief meeting" (Dictionary.com, encounter). The encounter between

cataloguer and resource for the purpose of aboutness determination is an overarching

theme that was interpreted and extracted from the interviews with three professional

cataloguers. This superordinate theme, "Aboutness as encounter," is a broad heading to

describe what are, in fact, encounters of a varied nature. These encounters, although

certainly foreseen as a result of the expectations placed on the cataloguer to perform her

work duties, often involve an unexpected encounter with the contents of the resource in

an attempt to determine what it is about. Until this encounter occurs, aboutness

determination is left unformulated. Not surprisingly, the experience is variable.

Nonetheless, some shared characteristics of the experience surfaced in the interviews that

describe aspects of the encounter. These aspects, which will be explored here, have been

characterized through the following thematic headings: "The initial encounter," "Moving beyond assumptions," "The immediate encounter," "Extending deeper," and "The ambiguous encounter." These themes serve to distinguish between the variable qualities of experience in the encounter between cataloguer and resource.

The initial encounter

Here is where the encounter between cataloguer and resource begins. For unknown items, it is a stage in relating marked by curiosity, inquisitiveness, and naivety. Irene describes:

> Irene: Well, when I'm opening something it feels like I am opening a present, kind of, and not in that exciting, Christmas morning kind of way, but where I don't know what's going to be inside. I am curious and I'm interested in how my little journey with this little book is gonna go.

Irene's analogy of the present is illustrative. A present is "something that is offered, presented, or given as a gift" (OED, present). However, a present is also something that is presented, given, bestowed. Irene's distinction between the Christmas morning kind of gift-opening and the opening of a resource for the purpose of fulfilling her tasks as a cataloguer is important and more fitting to the latter definition of present. She is engaging with a resource, and the act of determining its aboutness allows her to interact with what is given, beyond the sheets of paper and pieces of card-board covering. In the case of a resource, it is an offering of knowledge, insight, ideas, and perspectives for various purposes, such as the acquisition of knowledge or for entertainment, among others. She makes the distinction between excitement and curiosity, the latter is a felt-

sense related to the unknown aspect of the resource and the subsequent journey with the resource in trying to figure out what it is about.

The journey metaphor is also important. It implies a passage of time spent with the resource, which involves a beginning, an end, a place in between, and a direction (Turner, 1997). The metaphoric journey involves a progression or development towards a goal. Irene's journey with the resource begins with curiosity and interest. Her use of this metaphoric term implies a path headed in a direction beyond the initial encounter. Although not all journeys involve a clear destination, Irene's "little journey with this little book" is purposeful and is prompted by her reaching a specific destination, that being the creation of subject headings for unknown item searches in the catalogue. Although she is guided by a specific purpose and intention, her curiosity suggests that her journey is not characterised by repetition and sameness, but rather as a distinct and unique encounter.

Another important aspect of Irene's description involves the opening of the resource. Until the resource is opened, it is much like a wrapped gift. Although the contents of some gifts can be determined by their outer shape, the details are only revealed in the actual opening. The same can be said in opening a book. The cover may be suggestive of the inner contents, but until further investigation is done, any decisions about the item remains merely conjecture. Opening the resource is the "launching pad" that sets the journey in motion.

Stephen's initial examination of the resource also illustrates the initial encounter and the direction towards opening the resource for further elucidation. In this description,

Stephen is at the initial stage of examining the resource during the talk-

aloud/observational component of the interview:

> Stephen: … It's called, "At Home: A Short History of Private Life," and it's by
>
> Bill Bryson. I'm looking at the title and the cover it says "author of the 'Walk in
>
> the Woods' and a 'Short History of Nearly Everything'", uhm, so from the title
>
> and from the cover I can tell that it's a history and it has private life, but I'm not
>
> sure what that is exactly…Yeah, I've opened it and from the title page it has the
>
> same title as the cover so that doesn't tell me anything else (laughter).

Stephen makes some very preliminary observations about the resource from the title and

cover, but he acknowledges the limitations of his assertions. His opening the resource is

descriptive of the need to become better acquainted with the resource. The initial

encounter between cataloguer and resource shares similarities between the meeting of

persons. In an encounter between persons, one often makes very preliminary observations

about another, but it is really through engagement with another that one can move beyond

assumptions, however accurate or inaccurate they may be, towards a deeper

understanding. The cover and title are not insignificant - they form part of the resource

and may provide insight into its aboutness - but they often act as an introduction that

"nudges" further exploration.

Moving beyond assumptions

The cataloguers recognized the propensity to make assumptions in their

encounters with resources, and assumptions are often revealed as they move beyond the

initial encounter. By opening the resource for further analysis there is the potential to be "tripped up" by the clues they gathered in their initial encounter:

> Irene: This one looks like it's about education, right? This one, you open, and it's all about the Queen, which is not what you'd expect (laughter).

When Irene describes the resource as looking like it's about education, what she is suggesting is that there is an implied message to the resource cover that leads her to make initial inferences about its aboutness. She employs the word *right* to both affirm her conjecture and to have her conjecture affirmed. The term right is both a statement and an inquiry that the implied message from the resource cover is indeed a shared message, and is used to create an element of surprise when she finally reveals the content on the Queen. Creating an element of surprise highlights her intrigue in becoming acquainted with the resource.

Assumptions are not always incorrect, but may only reveal a part of a much bigger picture:

> Irene: So I assume it's a cookbook. And then I come to the table of contents and I'm surprised to see that there is not a list of types of food, but rather a list of the counties of Britain, and as I loom further, I see that it's organized that way.

In this description, Irene is in fact examining a cookbook, so her assumption about the genre is not incorrect. Her expectations are shaken, however, by the unconventional table of contents, which prompts her to look further to affirm whether or not her initial assumption is correct. Iser's (1972) examination of the reading process associated with literary works provides further insight into Irene's observation:

Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later
be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the
reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. The memory
evoked, however, can never reassume its original shape, for this would mean that
memory and perception were identical, which is manifestly not so. The new
background brings to light new aspects of what has been committed to memory;
conversely these in turn, shed their light on the new background, thus arousing
more complex anticipations (p. 283).

Irene's assumption about the resource, which is based on the premise of foreknowledge,
thus implying memory, is set against a different background in how it is organized. Her
preconceptions around the resource are ultimately suspended, and the new information
she has encountered has changed the shape she originally attributed to it.

Assumption-making is not an uncommon phenomenon, but it is an aspect of
aboutness determination that has the potential to misdirect the analysis:

Allen: One of the things that frequently strikes me is that, uhm… something
purports to be about something, or you would expect it to be about something, but
on closer examination, at least for subject access purposes, oh, it's not really that,
or it's not really about that, this is what it's about. It's either a cute title or it's just
not expressed in a way to lead one to what it's really about.

Allen also describes having his expectations fooled by some resources, but what is
particularly interesting is his suggestion that the resource itself is fraught with
inaccuracies that "pave the way" for incorrect assumption-making. The resource may

purport to be about something but fails to achieve its purpose. As Wilson (1968) says, "even if a person announces a clear-cut aim, we may often wonder if this is not the result of a post facto discovery or invention, the writing having in fact been guided by or directed to no clearly formulated goal but rather a vague and indefinite one" (p. 81). In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the tale of the "Emperor's New Clothes," the writer may believe she has achieved her goal, all the while leaving her reader in doubt, confusion, disbelief, or disagreement. As a result, the cataloguer's encounter becomes one of suspicion and/or critical relatedness. The appearance of the resource and its aboutness assertions prove unreliable, and the cataloguer is left to fill in the gaps.

The failure to achieve or accurately describe authorial purpose is only one aspect of Allen's description. He also talks about the "cute title". The term *cute* is an aphetic form of *acute*, which is defined as being "of the intellect or a product of it: having subtle or quick discernment; penetrating, keen, sharp-witted, shrewd, clever" (OED, acute). A cute title implies an intentionally clever and witty naming of a resource. When something has a cute title, it is not meant to be explicit, but rather a demonstration of contrived ingenuity. Allen makes the distinction between those titles that are "cute" and those that are "not expressed in a way to lead one to what it's really about". The latter does not imply quickness of wit, but rather something "couched in general or indefinite terms" (OED, vague).

The immediate encounter

This aspect of the shared experience relates to encounters of immediacy. It differs from the initial encounter because it is based on the assertion that the aboutness of a

resource can be determined fairly immediately. There is a quality of directness; of direct relation or connection (OED, immediacy):

> Stephen: …some titles are really straightforward and you know right away what the book is about just based on the title, cover, pictures on the cover, and things like that… some topics, like resume books - "hundred greatest resumes" - you know exactly what it is.

Stephen talks about "knowing right away what the books is about" based on only a few, immediate clues. One might say that he has made a "giant leap" to such an assertion, and that it is impossible to be certain about the aboutness of a resource based on only a few clues. It may, indeed, be a fine line between assumption-making and immediately knowing the aboutness of a resource. However, when he talks about knowing exactly what it is, he is describing a certain claim to authority that comes with experience.

As well, some resources may present themselves precisely for the purpose of being immediately identifiable. A resume book, for example, is written for a specific purpose or utility; there is desirability for it to be transparent and immediately identifiable. Allen's analysis of a resource also serves to illustrate:

> Allen: '1001 Timely Tips for Clutter Control: Knowing What to Keep, When to Toss, and How to Store Your Stuff.' To me that seems fairly straightforward, but I have no idea, I mean, I believe with a title that specific and everything that that is what it would actually have to be about …

Allen does not assert the same claim to authority as Stephen. He says that he believes instead of knows the resource to be about a certain topic. In this description,

Allen is actually looking at a resource uncommon to his specialization, so his reluctance is also associated with his unfamiliarity with the subject matter. Nonetheless, his comment about the specificity of the title being an advertent revelation of its aboutness is particularly illustrative. The title is explicit, unlike the cute title mentioned above. It also suggests, however, a degree of accessibility to the subject matter, despite it not being within his specialization. The topic of clutter, much the same as for resumes, is accessible to a broad audience, unlike, for example, physics or classical music. Yet, title specificity may be equally achievable within a particular domain. The distinction, however, is the accessibility of the subject matter, which is dependent on knowledge of the vocabulary particular to the discipline.

A term used by both Allen and Stephen to describe the immediate encounter is *straightforward*. The OED defines straightforward in language, narrative, or exposition as "direct, without circumlocution or digression" (OED, straightforward). The directness of certain resources makes them more immediately identifiable in aboutness determination.

Similarly, Irene uses the term *one-dimensional* to describe the immediacy and ease within which aboutness can be determined:

Irene: If it's a fairly general topic…no, that's not the right way to put this; if it's a fairly, uhm, one-dimensional topic, then that's easy.

In geometry, a dimension is "a mode of linear measurement, magnitude, or extension, in a particular direction; usually as co-existing with similar measurements or extensions in other directions. The three dimensions of a body, or of ordinary space, are length,

breadth, and thickness (or depth); a surface has only two dimensions (length and breadth); a line only one (length)" (OED, dimension). Although Irene's use of the term is figurative, its definition in geometry is useful in illuminating its meaning. Something that is one-dimensional is lacking in depth and in breadth. It is possible to see it completely, immediately; like a straight line, it has no variability. There is no part of its aboutness that is absent from the cataloguer.

Extending deeper

It is somewhat fitting to move from a description of one-dimensionality to a theme heading involving the extension of depth. It is, most commonly, the direction of depth that makes something three-dimensional; it is a "quality of being deep, or of considerable extension or distance downwards, or inwards" (OED, depth). This definition captures two important aspects of depth. Firstly, there is a quality of something being deep; and secondly there is the aspect of extension, of going deeper. Figuratively, Irene elucidates on the latter in her short description:

> Irene: If people are talking about something novel, or where they're connecting ideas from different disciplines, it's really hard to sort out. You may have to delve deeper…read a bit more…

Something that is new and novel is not necessarily something of great depth. But, importantly, there is an aspect of absence here that requires going to greater depths. Although the resource is present to the cataloguer as a form, its aboutness is absent to her because she does not have a grasp of the subject matter. When something is new or novel, there are unknown aspects that can not necessarily be inferred from initial clues. There is

a need to dig deeper into the resource; to make that which is unknown, known, at least to the degree that it serves aboutness determination.

The aspect of extending deeper into the resource may not be the result of complete ignorance or absence of understanding of the subject matter:

> Allen: Well, if I'm doing an original work I may scroll through the entire thesis. But in the abstract, the writer is supposed to sum up and say what it's about, and it's not always that easy to extrapolate from the table of contents. I mean you get a gist of what's all included, but where it's supposed to be going isn't always immediately evident. Sometimes if it's not enough you have to go through the resource until you get…

Allen's reference to having a gist of it suggests that he understands the main points or essence of the resource from the abstract and table of contents, but that its direction or development is not immediately evident, warranting greater investigation. Extending deeper here refers to a movement beyond simply the gist of the subject matter towards the development of ideas.

Stephen also talks about the need to extend deeper:

> Stephen: Yeah, so you always have to know what you are looking at. Uhm, and then depending on the complexity of the book, you maybe have to read through it and start reading some of it to figure it out.

There are two important aspects to this description. Firstly, Stephen talks about having to know what one is looking at. Although the statement may appear simplistic and obvious,

it points to an essential responsibility of the cataloguer in aboutness determination. This aspect of knowing is not only derived from an understanding of the subject matter, but there are also aspects of bibliographic description that form part of the "knowing what you are looking at" that Stephen alludes to in this brief statement. At an earlier point in the interview, he talks about publishers, and this description helps to illustrate:

> Stephen: … sometimes you have to look at who the publisher was, sometimes for those scientific…we get a lot of government documents, and government reports, and federal and provincial government reports, and things like that. So you have to see which publisher…what government department did it, so you have to go along those lines a bit.

Consideration of the publisher, often allotted to the work of bibliographic description, also acts as an aid in determining the aboutness of a resource. Stephen makes certain inferences from the descriptive aspects of the resource based on the boundaries that the publisher works within. Descriptive components, however, do not lead toward conclusive aboutness statements, but may act to define certain boundaries that the resource fits into.

The other important aspect of Stephen's description revolves around his use of the word *complexity*. The word has as its root the adjective *complex*, which is defined as "consisting of parts or elements not simply co-ordinated, but some of them involved in various degrees of subordination; complicated, involved, intricate; not easily analysed or disentangled" (OED, complex). What makes a resource complex is not the involvement of parts or aspects, but the intricacy of how these aspects are related. A useful analogy may be of a knotted ball of fine necklaces, whereby it is difficult to determine and

unravel the individual pieces because of the entanglement. As well, when a resource is considered complex, it intimates that a certain and determined position on the subject matter may not be readily identifiable, but requires a delving deeper into the resource to unravel the complicated composite of apparently indistinct parts.

The ambiguous encounter

It is appropriate to move from a discussion on complex resources that prompt one to extend deeper into the resource to a discussion on ambiguous encounters. The ambiguous encounter is defined as an obscure encounter between the cataloguer and the resource in the act of aboutness determination that may be left unresolved. The ambiguous encounter may involve the need to extend deeper into the analysis of the resource, but does not necessarily result in clarification or surefootedness. Stephen's description serves to illustrate:

Interviewer: How do you know you've adequately captured what it's about?

Stephen: Uhm, sometimes you can't…you know what it's about… sometimes things are really strange and it's really hard to figure out… uhm… but you do the best you can. You can't… you may only come up with one or two general subject headings or something or like, 'oh this person sort of talked about their life or something', so you may just use personal names as a subject heading.

Stephen's description is illustrative; not only because of his explanation, but in how it is articulated. Many of his sentences are halted and left unfinished, creating an impression of a fragmented, ambiguous experience. He pauses both times he uses the terms "you can't," as though a reminder of the moral of "The Little Engine That Could" comes to the

forefront of his consciousness and brings him to a halt in carrying on further in this manner of dialogue. Stephen's use of the idiom "do the best you can" is suggestive. Often used in reference to a difficult situation whereby one avows or is encouraged to do as well or as good as is possible, it suggests factors outside of his control. In this case, those factors include "strange" resources that only "sort of" elucidate on a subject. The phrase "sort of" is used adverbially as a parenthetic qualifier expressing hesitation, diffidence, or the like, on the speaker's part (OED, sort of).

On the surface, his comment "you know what it's about" seems out of place within the context of the rest of the description, which is more descriptive of the inability or difficulty in capturing the aboutness of certain resources. Yet, this brief utterance may suggest that knowing what something is about may be imbued with only a vague sense. In fact, the term *vague*, when applied to ideas and knowledge, is defined as "lacking in definiteness or precision; indefinite, indistinct" (OED, vague). This may explain why Stephen "may only be able to come up with one or two general subject headings." The lack of definiteness does not lend itself to precise articulation.

The ambiguous encounter is fraught with doubt:

Stephen: If it's more complicated, you…you may always be questioning what you did (laughter).

What is interesting in this short description is the reference to "always questioning." This denotes a relating to the resource that is left incomplete and without resolution. What's more, it suggests a "process of continual modification…closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life" (Iser, 1972, p. 286). Although Stephen is referencing a

sense of feeling curtailed with what he did with the resource, it also suggests that some resources themselves may be ambiguous and cannot be easily furnished with topics or in brief aboutness statements, but invite this process of continual modification Iser alludes to.

Another aspect of the ambiguous encounter relates to the recognition that the author may not have sufficient understanding of the subject matter. Allen provides a descriptive account:

Allen: … when these writers talk about identities and things, I think, now this may just be my age showing, but I don't think they always know what they're talking about, but it sounds good and it's a nice grab all, and it's very today, and everybody's talking this way so this is what we'll do. And some of them may be more clearly defined than others, but it's a nebulous thing. You can't pinpoint it. So you're talking about something and you sort of know what you're talking about but how do you nail that down in a controlled vocabulary situation?

Irene provides a brief, but similar description:

Irene: …sometimes you can tell even the author may not even have a handle on that really, particularly if it's interdisciplinary or a new field of study.

Earlier in this discussion there was an examination of the need to delve deeper when dealing with something that is novel. Here, both cataloguers draw a link between new fields of study and the tendency toward ambiguity in the author's object, aim, or purpose in writing. When something is new, it is not imbued with an established and/or well-defined vocabulary drawn from a large body of literature, nor has it necessarily

undergone the test of time. Often writers of original content are defining or re-defining the language they use. Birth is messy, and the births of writings are not exempt.

Allen's use of the word *nebulous* in the context of the ambiguous encounter is particularly illustrative. Defined as "vague, indistinct, formless, ill-defined," (OED, nebulous) the term denotes a quality of haziness that, as Allen remarks, is difficult to pinpoint. To pinpoint the aboutness of a resource is to identify it precisely. However, the cataloguer is unable to achieve her goal when dealing with something of a hazy and ambiguous nature. There is a degree of frustration expressed in Allen's description because he is impotent to fulfill his tasks, especially given the controlled boundaries within which he must perform them. Resources that do not allow him to achieve his goals become suspect. Wilson (1968) maintains that "it is difficult enough in any field of human behavior to discover a man's purposes by examining the results of his activity; and the difficulties must be greater than ordinary in the case of those most complex products of human effort, writings" (p. 81).

Fashioned by the structure

To fashion something, whether a material or immaterial object, is to "form, mould, shape" it (OED, fashion). This superordinate theme was so designated because of the recurrent descriptions that made reference to structures that shaped aboutness determination. The cataloguers described using subject heading systems to gain access to subject matter, as well as their propensity to think and articulate aboutness through subject headings. They also described feeling circumscribed by systems. Their knowledge of these systems is so influential that it has become inseparably integrated.

Although ISO-5963 suggests that aboutness determination is its own stage in subject analysis, a clearly-marked distinction of isolated stages was not revealed in the interviews. Rather, the cataloguers described their experience of aboutness determination within the context of these structures. That they do not separate the stages of subject analysis may be largely attributable to their experience within the profession; two of them have been cataloguing for over ten years, and the third for over twenty years. In fact, they all spoke about experience as an asset. Although it is not my intention to argue for or against their claims, it does suggest that the lifeworld of the cataloguer in aboutness determination is influenced by the length of time they have been cataloguing.

Turning to the subject headings

This theme, recurrent in the interviews, relates to a directional movement whereby the cataloguer turns to the controlled vocabularies to better understand the subject matter. Irene's brief description is particularly illustrative of this tendency among cataloguers to turn to the subject headings for access to the field:

> Irene: … so then you've got to go into the vocabulary to see what terms are related to each other just to get a better handle on the field itself. Often, meandering through the terminology will give you a better understanding of the field.

It is curious that Irene describes going to the subject headings for a better understanding of the field. In actuality, the terminologies may not provide a complete representation of the vocabularies employed in the field. It is not illogical that she would turn to the headings, since they serve as the controlled vocabulary tool she is required to use in her

records. But the headings are responsive, that is, they respond and expand based on literary warrant, which may be slow in development. Given that new fields or interdisciplinary works are areas of particular challenge to cataloguers, the headings may not be able to fully inform. This is not intended to be a criticism of Irene's decision-making, nor is it an absolute statement on the impotence of subject headings to be informative of a discipline. Rather, it demonstrates that her turning to the headings is a response to the finite structure that she works within. She does not search outside the structure for further access to the subject matter. She turns to the subject headings because she is bound by them.

When asked how she knows she has adequately determined the aboutness of a resource, Irene explains:

> Irene: I guess when I've poked around through the vocabulary and looked at related terms and narrower terms, and I think I figure that of all of those I have hit on the best, the most accurate ones, then I know the main part of the headings are done.

Irene associates adequately determining the aboutness of a resource with locating the most suitable subject headings. Her response conveys inseparability between aboutness determination and locating the main subject headings. She not only turns to the headings for clarification on the discipline, but also to find the most accurate vocabularies.

When asked how he keeps track of concepts as he is going along, Stephen provides a similar description to Irene:

Stephen: So I'm figuring it as I go along, trying to figure out the subject heading at the same time and doing some subject heading searches and that sometimes helps to figure it out because you can sometimes know like a broader and narrower term, and say, oh, that's a better…that's a good term to describe this.

Stephen's description shares some similarities with those outlined above. It suggests that he determines the aboutness of the resource while simultaneously searching for subject headings. Again, these two stages are approached inseparably. Obviously, he is approaching the subject search with an idea of the resource's aboutness given that search terms are required. But, Stephen turns to the headings to willingly put the required "words into his mouth," as though the concepts he attributes to the resource are peripheral. He talks about the subject heading searches as helping to figure it out, but in actuality, he must have a sense of the resource's aboutness for semantic relationships to be meaningful to him. He confuses aboutness determination from specific entry, creating the impression that the vocabularies are illuminating the aboutness of the resource, when in actual fact they are simply serving as vocabularies built of semantic relationships. The subject headings do not dictate aboutness, they serve it by providing a fixed and determinate vocabulary. However, when stages are so intertwined, procedural indistinction pervades the analysis, creating a muddled impression of stages.

Thinking in subject headings

Another recurrent aspect of the interviews involves a predisposition of the cataloguers to think in subject headings. This became especially apparent in the talk-aloud/ observational portion of the interviews, where the cataloguers analysed resources

aloud. The cataloguers not only articulated singular concepts or headings, but subject strings:

> Irene: I would probably put in another one for Food -- Great Britain or something like that.

Allen shares his analysis of a resource in a similar manner to Irene:

> Allen: This is a generic history of western art music so it would get Music -- History and Criticism and that would be the end of that.

Both Irene and Allen express the aboutness of the resource as subject strings, in contrast to an aboutness statement, which is a brief, written summary that sets forth the main concepts extracted from the examination. Whether or not the terms Irene and Allen use in the talk-aloud are actual headings is a moot point. What is important is their manner of communication, which reveals a developed understanding of pre-coordinated subject strings and illustrates a move from main headings to subdivisions without procedural deconstruction. Their knowledge of controlled vocabulary systems has resulted in an automatic response, appearing to bypass the identification of concepts through summary or statement, and moving in the direction of subject string creation. That they think in headings and subject strings reflects a learned skill and a highly developed understanding of the tools and structures acquired through experience:

> Allen: I am so experienced that I can't really divorce that [aboutness determination] from what I do in arriving at class numbers and at subject headings.

Allen's comment affirms an inseparability of stages to such a degree that he is unable to make a distinction between processes. He believes this to be his professional obligation:

> Interviewer: Sounds like you're thinking of headings?

> Allen: All the time. I've just been in this business too long, yeah, you should speak to non-librarians. That's what we're trained to think; that's our job. We're not paid to consider other things. It has to fit in with whatever system we are using. I suppose if you were in a system where you assigned keywords then you would approach it that way; then, of course, a system with much greater freedom than we have.

Allen's comment about being trained to think in subject headings is important. The headings are dominant in how he relates to the resource. The influence of subject heading systems is paramount. A system is defined as "a set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent, so as to form a complex unity; a whole composed of parts in orderly arrangement according to some scheme or plan; rarely applied to a simple or small assemblage of things" (OED, system). For Allen, aboutness determination is not a separate part of the system; it can't be divorced from arriving at class numbers and at subject headings; it forms part of the composite whole.

Structure as shape-giving

This theme is defined by descriptions that reflect how the vocabularies, structure and guidelines, and the catalogue record influence aboutness determination. It is an aspect of the analysis that forms part of the cataloguer's consideration and gives direction and shape to aboutness determination. Irene's description serves to illustrate:

Irene: … the whole time you are thinking what it's about, you're also trying to crystallize, because you know you'll have to go the vocabulary, crystallize two or three at most (if you can get away with it) topics.

The word *crystallize* is especially interesting in this description. Figuratively speaking, to crystallize is "to cause to become concrete or fixed; to make clear or defined" (OED, crystallize). In other words, it is to move aboutness from the "vaporous" thinking realm, toward the formation, or crystallization, of ideas as topics. The crystallization process is spurred by the necessity of applying controlled vocabularies. The vocabularies influence aboutness determination through attribution. The shape-giving direction is also influenced by guidelines that specify two or three as the preferred number of subject headings attributed to the resource.

Another dimension in how the structure shapes aboutness determination relates to the principle of specific entry:

Interviewer: The concepts you are looking for, are you looking broadly (overarching concepts) or are you looking for specific?

Stephen: You try to get as specific as possible. That's one of the things you are supposed to do for subject headings. You are supposed to get as specific as possible.

Given that Stephen described searching for subject headings at the same time as conducting aboutness determination, it is not surprising that he refers to subject headings here. For Stephen, aboutness determination occurs simultaneously alongside subject heading searching. Most importantly, however, is his acknowledgement that specific

entry is an aspect of consideration that shapes his decision-making. He is not just

selecting broad concepts or subject headings on a topic, but looks for specific terms that

most accurately reflect the resource. The structure assigns specific entry as a guideline.

When asked how he relates to the resource he is cataloguing when trying to

determine what it's about, Allen provided the following response:

> Allen: … you look for those things that you will need for the catalogue record…
> you look for those things that will have an impact on what goes into that
> catalogue record.

Reference to the catalogue record implies an already established manner of relating to the

resource. He comes to the resource purposefully and with intention that gives shape in

how he relates to it. He is predisposed by the structure. In fact, the structure affects and

defines his interaction. Interestingly, the catalogue record is the focus of his examination.

He looks for things that will have an impact on the record. To have an impact is "to have

a pronounced effect on" something (OED, impact). His description may give the

impression that the resource serves the record, but this is not entirely correct. The

catalogue record is impotent without reference to a resource; it acts as a surrogate. The

catalogue record, however, is neither entirely submissive to the resource, but predisposed

by systems and structures that define and shape it.

Circumscribed by the subject headings

To circumscribe something is "to confine within narrow limits, to restrict the free

or extended action of, to hem in, restrain, abridge" (OED, circumscribe). In light of this

definition, this theme is defined by descriptions where aboutness determination is stunted

by the prescribed vocabularies. Sometimes the mergence between the aboutness of the resource and the subject headings does not come easily:

> Allen: … maybe the best example in my work would be cataloguing new theses, because they're always trying to expand the *w h o l e   a r e a   o f   k n o w l e d g e   a n d   h o w   w e   t h i n k   a n d   p e r c e i v e   t h i n g s* , so you can look at the abstract and you're scratching your head - not because you don't get what they're saying (sometimes you don't), usually you have an idea, but how are you going to cram that into an LC subject heading with this prescribed vocabulary, you know.

Allen's description suggests that there are occasions when the structure of the prescribed vocabularies does not satisfy the expansive nature of the resource. He uses significant word painting to describe the expansive nature associated with theses, which is illustrated through the use of expanded character spacing. After creating an impression of expansiveness he employs the word *cram* to describe the attempt to fit or shape the resource to the subject heading tools. This highly colourful description really captures the strain and compression associated with shaping the aboutness of certain resources to the prescribed vocabulary systems. The quality of compression forms an aspect of relating to the resource when the structure is inseparable from aboutness determination.

Expressing the aboutness of a resource may also be circumscribed by lack of specificity in subject headings:

> Stephen: Sometimes there aren't subject headings that exist for the topic … sometimes you use two or three subject headings to cover the subject because there isn't a good way to deal with it. You use sort of broad terms to deal with it.

Like, we had this one provincial government document, it was on, I guess they're

called Granny Flats, sort of supplement small apartment houses that are sort of

attached to...I can't remember the term the government used but there wasn't

anything really concrete in LC to cover that. So it's sort of - Housing --

Apartments - sort of general subject headings like that.

Interviewer: So how do you articulate that concept if you don't have the

headings?

Stephen: You can't…you can't really…there's nothing really you can do about it.

One could argue that a discussion of specific entry relates to subject headings attribution,

and is not relevant to a discussion on aboutness determination. This would certainly be a

relevant argument had the interviewees provided descriptions of aboutness determination

independent from subject heading attribution. However, as previously stated, the stages

are not necessarily experienced as separate and distinct; there is often overlap. Stephen's

description reveals how aboutness determination can be unfulfilled and stunted by

vocabularies that lack specificity. His inability to adequately express aboutness creates an

experience of impotence. Aboutness is weakened by the subject heading tools.

Integrated knowledge

The term *knowledge*, as presented here, is of two kinds that often overlap. Firstly,

it involves an acquired understanding; it is "the fact or condition of having acquired a

practical understanding or command of, or competence or skill in, a particular subject,

language, etc., esp. through instruction, study, or practice." The second type of

knowledge expressed in the theme heading refers to "an act of apprehending something

with the mind; a perception, intuition, intimation, etc" (OED, knowledge). Integrated, refers to a "uniting into one system several constituents previously regarded as separate." Something that is integrated is "combined into a whole" (OED, integrated). Within this theme, aboutness determination is characterized by a developed understanding that has become integrated to such an extent that it is perceived as being instinctive:

> Interviewer: How do you decide when you have adequately determined the aboutness of a resource?

> Irene: That's a good question. It's very instinctive. I guess when I've poked around through the vocabulary and looked at related terms and narrower terms, and I think I figure that of all of those I have hit on the best, the most accurate ones, than I know the main part of the headings are done. Then the subdivisions - subdivisions are harder. That really takes experience… to know what subdivisions even exist. So, but, once you've got that sorted out. Once you figure you've got all of the main concepts covered in one way or another, and you investigated related terminology to make sure there isn't something better, then you know, following that 20% guideline I was talking about, then I know that I'm done.

Irene's description of poking around through the vocabulary to look at terms and their semantic relationships is not unlike Stephen's description of turning to the vocabularies to "put the words into his mouth," and demonstrates these two stages as integrated. The description also points to how the structure and its 20% guideline shapes her experience. Most importantly, however, for this discussion, is her comment about it being instinctive, followed by a detailed description of how what is instinctive is realized. Something that

is instinctive is "resulting from instinct or innate prompting" (OED, instinctive). "Instinct", as quoted by Baring-Gould, is "the co-ordination and transmission of past experiences." (OED, instinct). What she describes is not an experience that is innate to the entire human race, but an understanding that has been acquired to such an extent that it is perceived as being instinctive. It is integrated knowledge.

Irene also talks about having a *sense* of aboutness:

Irene: … in English I can just scan a few pages when I come across something…you can tell just by looking that something meaty is happening and then keep going. You get a few pages in, the first few and the last few. You can get a sense, I think, a sense enough.

A sense is "an instinctive or acquired faculty of perception or accurate estimation" (OED, sense). Interestingly, this definition references both the instinctive and acquired faculty associated with having a sense of something. When Irene talks about having a "sense enough" of the resource's aboutness, she is making reference to her perception that she has reached an accurate estimation of the aboutness for the purpose of accomplishing her task. Her perception of what is enough involves an acquired skill that has become integrated to such a degree that it is perceived as instinctive. As well, aboutness is achieved both through interaction with parts of the resource, and with the intention to create subject headings. Having sense enough is knowing her intentional purpose in relating to the resource.

Integrated knowledge presupposes experience because it is related to the notion of acquired knowledge. Allen provides a fitting description of this aspect:

Interviewer: How do you decide when you have adequately determined the aboutness of a resource?

Allen: Well, if it's easy you know that pretty early on.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how you know that because it's intuitive to you.

Allen: Sure, and I may be drawing on some of the books that I pull of the shelf here. If I get this book, "A History of Western Music" by Donald Grout, every music student knows this is the textbook for, uhm, history in literature about Western Music. You assign Music -- History and Criticism and you are done.

Interviewer: Just from the title?

Allen: Well, I know the work. I know the name, I know the author, and I know the work. It could be the second edition or the twentieth edition; it is always going to be that.

Allen explains his decision-making by revealing knowledge of the work. His reiteration of the word *know* is emphatic. In this description, knowing involves recognition. Recognition implies something previously acquired - knowledge of the title, work, and author. Allen makes assertive aboutness statements, even to the extent of articulating the subject headings, based on a supposition acquired through previous experience. The consistent sameness among the various editions of the resource allows him to justify these inferences.

This theme also relates to how cataloguers perceive time, and time as a form of knowledge. Both Irene and Stephen iterate their perception of time of aboutness determination as a form of knowing. Irene describes her perception of time:

> Irene: Working with English language materials, no, I am confident enough with my skills that I don't have to watch the clock. I know the time that I am taking is appropriate because I know I am good enough at it. Uhm…if it's in a language I am not terribly familiar with, then yeah, I'll keep my eye on the clock a little bit longer, and if I'm really struggling then I'll try to find someone who can speak the language to help me out.

Interestingly, Irene employs the term *enough* again, this time in reference to her assurance in her abilities. The term enough suggests sufficient confidence in her ability to determine the aboutness of most resources. Confidence in skill serves as a form of knowing; it forms a perception of time sufficient to the task without need to establish linear boundaries. When confidence is lost with foreign language materials unfamiliar to her, so is the sense of knowing what is sufficient time to give to the task. It is no longer an integrated process, but one that is reliant on external factors, such as the clock or a translator.

Stephen articulates a sense of "long enough" when describing how he relates to some resources, particularly of a challenging nature:

> Stephen: Yeah, so I'll do the best I can and figure…okay, I've been trying to work on this for long enough and this is the best I can do; I can't do anymore, so I'll just send it on.

His description is similar to Irene's in that he has a sense of enough, but his is of a different nature. Stephen's description suggests that long enough bears a quality of exhaustion, and even a quality of having transgressed, that is, in having extended his time with a resource in aboutness determination. Although his description does not allude to the same sense of confidence articulated by Irene, it does still suggest an integrated knowing when aboutness determination has been exhausted.

Acting as intermediate agent

The intermediary or intermediate agent analogy associated with cataloguers is not new. An intermediate agent is one who acts between others, be they persons or things. The cataloguer serves as intermediate agent between the resource and the user. One could argue that the intermediate is actually the catalogue itself, since the user rarely interacts with the cataloguer. This may certainly prove to be the case in a future where artificial intelligence dominates. However, the current state of cataloguing involves human beings, namely cataloguers, who create records for the catalogue. Given this intermediate role, consideration of both the resource and the user are aspects that form part of the cataloguer's consciousness. These two considerations, although being discussed here as distinct, are interrelated.

Considering the resource

Perhaps one of the most overt aspects of this theme involves a consideration of authorial and/or publisher's purpose in aboutness determination. A purpose is a "reason for which something is done or made, or for which it exists; the result or effect intended or sought; the end to which an object or action is directed; aim" (OED, purpose). As

mentioned earlier, an author may fail to articulate or achieve her purpose, but this must not make all authors suspect; it is simply a potentiality. Some resources "exude" purpose:

> Allen: So how does this item present itself? What do the author and the publisher think the purpose of this is even if it doesn't quite fit in with the subject headings? So, ah, yesterday, I catalogued a sound recording called "Classic Weepies"… it is just a compilation of classical music for a specific purpose … somebody compiles works from all sorts of classical genres together so that somebody who wants to feel melancholy can get in the mood.

Allen's description contains two interrelated questions that focus his examination. His use of the verb "present" is noteworthy; it suggests a purpose behind how the resource is put before the eye of the beholder. The first question is interrelated with the second because it implies a publisher's or author's intent, which may or may not be overtly expressed, but is inferred from aspects of its presentation. These questions form an aspect of consideration in aboutness determination because intention helps in understanding, defining, and positioning the resource. Referencing the purpose of the resource in aboutness determination is also considering its usefulness; purpose suggests an intended utility. The consideration of the resource's purpose becomes interconnected to the consideration of its usefulness, thus implying a user.

> Spatial aspects also form part of the consideration of the resource:

> Interviewer: Are there any spatial aspects? Are you thinking of the resource as a unit or as part of a greater whole?

Irene: Both. Both. Uhm…mostly as a unit, because I think that's a large aspect of how people use library resources. They find *a* book, or maybe a few. They don't think about how it fits into the larger collection. I have to, particularly, again, when it comes to classification and controlled vocabulary; both of those things are about how this thing relates to everything else, with the broader and narrower headings and everything else. So, yeah, that's just an intrinsic part of the job; fitting this thing into how it relates to everything else.

Interviewer: So when you are first analysing it to gain a sense of the main concepts of it, are you thinking of it as a part of the greater?

Irene: No, just as a unit.

It is not surprising that Irene considers the resource as an isolated unit in aboutness determination. Much like encountering a new person, each resource is unique. It should be noted that Irene works predominantly with rare books, and rarely has to consider continuing resources, which may have elicited a different response, or a different understanding of what a unit implies. For Irene, a unit refers to a singular manifestation of an item. However, Irene comes to the resource laden with structures that define her analysis, and these structures have been described as influential in aboutness determination. Once she begins to consider classification and controlled vocabularies, her focus adjusts to guidelines associated with collocation.

Another aspect in consideration of the resource drawn from the interview with Stephen relates to the notion of access to information resources:

Stephen: … They might look up a term, and if that term doesn't exist in LCSH,

then there's…they may not be able to think of other terms that are sort of related,

and they would get frustrated too, and they wouldn't find the item, and it would

just sit on the shelf unless someone comes along and browses or whatever.

Stephen's description highlights the ethical implications associated with inhibiting access

to library materials as a result of unspecific subject heading attribution. His description

makes reference to both the resource and the user, and demonstrates their

interrelatedness. Although the description seems to predominantly focus on the user, his

mention of the resource being unfindable and sitting on the shelf until something

fortuitous occurs, suggests that he is conscious of how subject headings influence the

resource. There is an injustice committed against the resource. His role as intermediate

agent is to create the opportunity for access, and the resource is an essential consideration

because it acts as the "fruit" of discovery. No resource, no user.

Considering the user

Continuing with the principle of providing access to library resources alluded to

just above, it is now fitting to address the user as consideration. Irene provides a

particularly rich description of how considering the user influences her decision-making:

Irene: The whole idea is to provide access to the people who want it, while not

providing access to the people who don't, right. A lot of the time, uhm, I think

people know they have to provide access to people who want something, but they

don't think equally about the people who don't want to find it. And they're just as

important. If they get a hit list that's a mile long that they have to weed through, then that doesn't help them.

As Irene says, the principle of providing access to a resource often dominates, with minimal consideration given to those who don't want access. Cataloguers may become over-conscientious of the user by attributing broad terms and/or too many terms:

> Irene: If something is about spiders, you are not going to assign a subject heading, Animals, because somebody looking for things about animals wants a general thing about animals. They don't want every book about every animal … you want to pick the term that captures the whole work, but the narrowest term that captures the whole work. That's the guideline.

Irene's assertion about what the user wants and does not want is an expression of how her understanding of the guidelines influence her decision-making. It may also imply an understanding of her library's collection given that a smaller collection may warrant choosing broader terms. Of course, by contributing to a global union catalogue, local consideration must be weighed in against consortial considerations. The user takes on a different meaning in a global context than in a local one. She becomes more universal, fitted within the guidelines that define her.

Allen references the user by considering audience in aboutness determination. His reference was made during the talk-aloud/observational component when he was analysing a book called, "Celebrating Christmas: Hundreds of Ideas, Recipes and Flower, Food, and Gift Decorating Projects":

Allen: Well, it's a book designed for people who care about this stuff, so they

probably envision a women's audience, domestic things because all these things

have to do with preparing for social occasions, what to do, how to prepare, what

food to make, how to decorate, gift giving, gift making, countdown to Christmas.

The accuracy of his assertion about audience, although debatable, is not particularly

relevant here. Rather, it is to understand how audience shapes his encounter with the

resource. The implied audience, inferred from content characteristics, provides him with

a context of use. The audience creates a perception of potential users and guides

aboutness determination based on the resource's usefulness to the inferred user group.

Interestingly, it is through the resource that he makes inferences about the user.

Summary of the findings

The lived experience of the cataloguer in aboutness determination has been

interpreted as an encounter. The encounter involves a meeting between the cataloguer

and the resource for the purpose of subject identification. It serves as a useful

superordinate theme because it implies variability; that is, it is not predetermined. When

dealing with the entire potential of human knowledge, as shared through resources, the

notion of a determinate encounter is almost absurd. Yet, without being definitive, the

encounters presented here give shape to qualities of experience shared through

descriptive elucidation.

Although of an indeterminate nature, the cataloguer's encounter with the resource

is not completely open, but predisposed by the structure and guidelines associated with

subject cataloguing. Whether rightly or wrongly, experienced cataloguers do not conduct

aboutness determination as a distinct and separate stage of subject cataloguing. They exploit the systems they work with and their thinking is shaped and guided by these same systems.

Aboutness determination is also influenced by the cataloguer's role as an intermediate agent. Although she may work in the backroom of the library, or even off-site altogether, she does not operate in isolation. Rather the resource and the user are an intentional part of her consciousness and influence her decision-making.

CHAPTER X

DISCUSSION

Given the deeper understanding of the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination, it is possible to return to aspects of the literature with greater potential to engage in a meaningful discussion. Understanding lived experience does not mean we accept things as they are, but that first we must understand what they are if we are to approach them with thoughtfulness and insight.

The findings demonstrate, first and foremost, that the cataloguer's experience of aboutness determination involves a complex encounter with the resource that is influenced by subject heading systems and guidelines, and in which the cataloguer assumes the role of intermediate agent in consideration of both the resource and the user. One may argue the research is flawed because of the inclusion of descriptions and analysis related to subject heading attribution. For example, Joudrey's (2005) dissertation research purposefully set out to qualitatively understand aboutness determination without the "corruption" that professional cataloguers bring to the act as a result of their experience with subject heading systems. He explains that "working professionals were deliberately excluded from the research design to avoid their shortcuts and the commingling of the conceptual analysis and translation processes that occurred in Šauperl's study" (p. 74). Instead, he employed library science students who had a basic understanding of information organization as his sample. Chu and O'Brien also used LIS students, with an understanding of subject analysis acquired through coursework, in their questionnaire-based study to limit the potential influence that working with specific

systems brings to subject analysis. Although I do not wish to argue for or against the merits of Chu and O'Brien and Joudrey's research, it begs the question as to why "pure" or uninfluenced understanding of aboutness determination is only possible by the novice. Their research may have greater value in subject analysis pedagogy, where distinct stages, such as those provided by ISO 5963-1985, are given greater attention due to the predominance of inexperience with subject heading systems among LIS students.

The experience of professional and experienced cataloguers does involve the comingling Joudrey attempts to avoid as demonstrated through this research. Although it was my intention, going into the interviews, to keep aboutness determination separate from subject heading attribution, despite my best efforts, and as Joudrey would have expected, the cataloguers did not always describe aboutness determination as a separate phenomenon. Any attempt on my part to restrict the inclusion of subject headings would have resulted in an unnatural confinement or distortion of their experience. Their relationships to subject heading systems are deeply embedded in how they relate to the resource for aboutness determination. As Allen said, "… I can't really divorce that [aboutness determination] from what I do in arriving at class numbers and at subject headings". These systems are a significant influence, whether rightly or wrongly, on their experience, even to such an extent that they refer to subject heading systems to get a better handle on the subject matter. Šauperl (1999) observed a similar phenomenon, but her participants examined subject headings from associated records together with the examination of the book to better understand the subject matter (p. 229). What this demonstrates is that the stages of subject cataloguing, while certainly valuable to the new cataloguer, are not so clearly distinguishable for the experienced cataloguer. There is a

mergence of stages in the experienced cataloguer's relatedness to the resource. Given that hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in experience as it is lived, it was important to give heed to this aspect of the phenomenon.

Despite the inclusion of subject headings, there were also parts of the descriptions where "raw" aboutness determination was identified. These were marked in the results section under the superordinate heading "Aboutness as encounter". The variability of these encounters is, quite simply, related to the diversity and complexity of the resources that cataloguers contend with, and the knowledge and experience each brings to their work. Aboutness determination cannot be summarized into a nice, neat, clean package because of these aspects of variability. There is a messiness associated with it. This is not to suggest that aboutness determination can be summed up as being "all relative." Rather, through interpretive elucidation of the cataloguer's descriptions of aboutness determination, shape and form have been given to this "messy" and variable experience. This form does not act as an absolute, unmalleable structure. Instead, it is available to question and challenge, as well as to gain insight into experience, and ultimately to lead to greater awareness of aboutness determination activity.

Although this study employed experienced cataloguers as the sample, it shares some similarities with that of Daniel Joudrey (2005). While Joudrey is more interested in understanding processes of aboutness determination, and less in qualities of experience, when understood relationally, Joudrey's processes share similarities with the notion of an encounter. His "Input Process … consists of voluntary and involuntary exposure to data" and "involves both purposeful searching activities and accidental encounters, as it can be difficult to separate the two" (p. 241). The distinction between this research and

Joudrey's is that Joudrey lumps all aspects of data gathering into one process, while the encounter presented in this research, also voluntary or involuntary, demonstrates different aspects of relating to the resource marked by qualities of experience. Joudrey asks, "How do participants determine the aboutness of an item? What activities are involved? What are the observable patterns in the aboutness determination process" (p. 9). In contrast, this study asks "what are the essential qualities of experience of aboutness determination for professional cataloguers? What is it like?" In contrast to looking for patterns of behaviour, this research identifies aspectual themes of experience. Any answers surrounding "how" aboutness determination is fulfilled are interpreted for what they reveal about the cataloguer's lifeworld. These qualities of experience shed light on the cataloguer's relatedness to the resource in aboutness determination.

Conclusion

What are the implications of understanding the cataloguer's lived experience of aboutness determination? Why is it important? Quite simply, understanding experience is the starting place for constructing any meaningful and relevant policies, practices, and/or theories. Entrance to the cataloguer's lifeworld allows for understanding of the phenomenon as it is experienced, which allows for a meaningful assessment or re-assessment of our presuppositions and theoretical constructs. In other words, "in bringing to reflective awareness the nature of events experienced in our natural attitude, we are able to transform or remake ourselves in the true nature of *Bildung* (education)" (van Manen, 2007, p. 7). It is possible to see and meet the phenomenon in all its "messiness" and to attribute meaning and understanding to that which is, most often, simply taken for granted.

The encounter presented in the findings section illustrates intentionality, that is, the inseparable connectedness of the cataloguer to the resource in the act of aboutness determination. Aboutness determination is oriented activity; the cataloguer is oriented to the resource. Despite being an inanimate object, the resource is complicated by its contents, which includes anything within the realm of the human imagination and/or of human knowledge. Given the enormity of dealing with the whole of human knowledge, it is not surprising that the encounter involves a sundry of experience.

The influence of subject heading systems on cataloguers' experience of aboutness determination demonstrates that cataloguers do not work "in a vacuum." Rather, their propensity to think in subject headings and to work closely with subject heading systems demonstrates their connection and reliance on systems and structures. Despite these influences, aboutness determination is not a lost process. Rather, it overlaps with the attribution of subject headings and is predisposed by principles and guidelines associated with systems.

The cataloguer's intermediate position between the library user and the resource also influences her intentional relatedness to the resource in aboutness determination. The user, however vague and indistinct, forms an aspect of consideration, as does the resource. These two aspects, although interpreted in distinction from each other, are in fact inseparably connected. One presupposes the other.

Future research

   The diversity of experiences helps to provide insight into possible future research. Despite Huthins' (1977) claim that indexers should not concern themselves with rheme, that part of the document that provides something new to the knowledge base, the cataloguers expressed concern with the new information being described by the document, and also expressed difficulty in articulating concepts and/or finding appropriate controlled terminologies to describe it. Their experiences relate to both new ideas and new approaches to research, such as interdisciplinarity. There is a sense that cataloguers do not feel properly equipped to describe these resources, and yet they are concerned with bringing forth the new information conveyed in the resource. Given Weinberg's (1988) observation that scholars rarely use subject indexes because they lack aspectual perspective, and the cataloguer's propensity towards addressing new ideas in subject analysis, this is an area that requires further research. This could involve, in particular, the examination of theses and interdisciplinary resources, and offers the potential to provide greater support to professionals working with resources of a more complicated nature.

   As well, since cataloguers spoke of some resources being straightforward and others as being vague, future research could further refine how cataloguers attribute characteristics to resources. For example, the "Straightforward encounter" identified in the findings would likely be positioned within Hjørland's (1992) naïve conception of subject identification. Although the naïve conception is not considered the most epistemologically meaningful approach, there were occasions where cataloguers felt that little analysis was required; that the subject was immediately or near-immediately

identifiable, and that there was a quality of knowing associated with this immediacy. Is this to discount their experience as being simply naïve, or to suggest that their experience points to the potential that some resources may not warrant a deeper analysis. What are the qualities and characteristics of such resources? This is a question that may be explored through further research.

As demonstrated in the results, the user forms an important aspect of the cataloguer's consideration in aboutness determination. All three of them spoke about their responsibility to the user, but it remains unclear to what extent their understanding of the user influences their decision-making. Although the user is an aspect of consideration in aboutness determination, none of the cataloguers spoke of users beyond the general, nor did they express being motivated by any specific user-based approaches, such as Albrechtsen's (1993) requirements-oriented approach. Context may be influential here. The three cataloguers come from academic, public, and cooperative services. "In these contexts," says Hutchins (1978), "it is not possible to make any general assumptions about the cultural and educational backgrounds of readers" (p. 179). However, the implication of a general notion of user is unclear. What value is there in talking about users if the user is too general and broad to be identified? Future research could further examine the cataloguer's perception of the general user, to what extent the general notion of user serves the library community, and if there is a value in identifying the user beyond the general.

That experienced cataloguers co-mingle the stages of subject analysis was observed, both in this research, and that of Šauperl (1999). Whether rightly or wrongly, subject heading systems influence aboutness determination among experienced

cataloguers, even to such a degree that, after observing his tendency to think in subject

headings, Allen suggested I speak with non-librarians! Although ISO 5963-1985

acknowledges that there may be overlap among the three stages, future research could

determine if behaviours of overlap are effective. According to Langridge (1989) "subject

analysis is frequently not seen clearly as a distinct activity: it tends to merge with

translation and results inevitably suffer" (pp. 6-7). He argues that "a document can be

assigned to its place in a system only when its precise nature has been determined" (p. 7).

The library community would do well to determine if there is a value in encouraging

cataloguers to conduct subject cataloguing in distinct and systematic stages that clearly

distinguish aboutness determination from the translation stage. To find this out the

community needs to give greater attention to aboutness determination.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

1. How did you come to be a cataloguing librarian? (narrative and broad question)
    Prompt: Is there something about who you are that suits this work?

2. Can you tell me about what you do in your job? (descriptive and broad question)
    Prompts: Describe a typical day. What happens? Is there a structure to your activities? Can you describe that structure?

3. Let's focus on the aboutness part of your work. Can you tell me about that? Feel free to share an example. (descriptive and more narrowly focussed)
    Prompts: Describe what it's like for you? Can you describe your thought processes? Are there any emotions that arise? Can you describe these emotions?

4. How do you relate to the resource that you are cataloguing when you are trying to determine what it is about? (descriptive and more narrowly focussed)
    Prompts: Do you look at specific parts of the work? Are there differences between some resources and how you relate to them? What are some of the considerations?

5. How do you decide when you have adequately determined the aboutness of a resource? (descriptive and more narrowly focussed)
    Prompts: Is there a feeling attached to it? Is there a sense attached to it? What is the feeling/sense like?

6. Is there anything else about the aboutness part of your work that you would like to share with me? (descriptive and more narrowly focussed)
    Probe: Are there time aspects? (e.g. What is your experience of time when determining the aboutness of a work?) Are there spatial aspects? (e.g. Are you thinking of the resource as a unit or as part of a greater whole?)