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ANNUAL CONFERENCE

LIBRARIES IN AN AGE OF DEMOCRACY



Collaborate and Uncomplicate: Best Practices for Managing and Maintaining African Languages Collections

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing need

- Inclusive collections
- User-oriented collections
- Decolonising collections
- Consideration of language policies

PRESENTATION ROADMAP

- African Languages Collections
- Unique challenges
- Best practices managing and maintaining (solutions)
- Focus on user experience and collaboration



HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

HISTORICAL IMBALANCES

- Underdevelopment, underrepresentation of AL in libraries:
 - Allocating funds toward growing one, but not all African languages
 - Led to current inequalities in publishing industry
 - Reflected in library collections

DIVERSITY OF COLLECTION

- Collection houses 8 different languages (isiZulu, Sepedi, Setswana, Southern Sotho, isiNdebele, Tsivenda, Xitsonga, Siswati)
- Many genres: Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Essays

CHALLENGES within AFRICAN LANGUAGES LITERATURE



GROWING USER DEMAND

- Mother tongue education
- Rights of access to information, in own language, inclusivity and equality
- Library Users' needs for and expectations of collection
- Language policy implementation at universities

FROM POSITION OF PREVIOUS DISADVANTAGE

- Limited funds
- Small no of publishers
- Lack of infrastructure
- Small print runs – always 'out of print'
- Physical format of books: softcover, thin (no space for spine label)
- Ironically, despite diversity – format and cover art of books very similar, difficult to find the book user needs

CATALOGUING & SHELVING COMPLEXITIES



MULTILINGUAL CATALOGUING

- Understanding of various languages; related languages, e.g. isiZulu and isiNdebele
- Language not always identified by publisher's note
- Google Translate no help
- Not all items had identifying metadata

DEWEY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

- Originally distinguished by letters (S), e.g. 496.327**S**3205 (Sepedi Grammar)
- Dewey numbers required to be changed - collection had to be reclassified
- Closely related numbers
e.g. isiZulu Poetry 896.398**6**1 isiNdebele Poetry 896.398**9**1
and isiZulu Drama 896.398**6**2, Fiction 896.398**6**3

SHELVING NON-STANDARD FORMATS

- Thin, softcover books: hard to keep neat, difficult to navigate
- User frustration

RESPONSIBILITY CUTTING ACROSS UNITS

- Without reaching out, no solutions

SOLUTIONS: POWER OF COLLABORATION

CROSS-DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION

- Between shelving staff, cataloguers and subject librarians

PLUS FACULTY

- Requested UX study: students testing ease of use, giving feedback

Examples:

• Having to find a Northern Sotho (Sopedi) book for the first time in the library was more of a tiring situation for me, as I really struggled to find the books).

• I would consider this as a "hard experience" and a very tiring one, as I would think of nothing, but to give up looking for the book. 😞

1. The zulu books are many. I suggest that they are situated in one place because it was very hard finding one.

2. The Venda books are so little and are situated in one place - it is very easy to find them.

3. The system is okay. I would give it a 7/10. I think there should be that if they can be set according to the genre, the poems one side and novels one side. It would be very beneficial and time efficient.

• Getting more Tshivenda books would be a great investment in languages.

PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

- Each member's unique experience enriched the team, bringing a more efficient solution

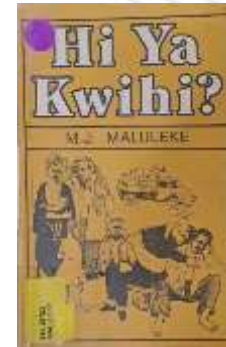
CATALOGUING SOLUTIONS

BEST PRACTICES

- Standardising metadata
- Ensuring subject-specific and genre-specific tags, e.g.
 - Zulu Fiction
 - Setswana Drama
 - Ndebele Poetry

CLASSIFICATION

- Devise and allocate genre-specific class numbers
- Solution: colour-code each language and book
- Added value: place books in boxes with “key” on spine
- Lots of extra work – but worth it!



LANGUAGES	BASIC CALL NO.
Ndebele (blue)	896.3989
N. Sotho (Pedi) (red)	896.39771
S. Sotho (lime)	896.39772
Swazi (Siswati) (orange)	896.3987
Tsonga (purple)	896.3978
Tswana (yellow)	896.39775
Venda (white)	896.3976
Xhosa (gold)	896.3985
Zulu (green)	896.3986



SHELVING AND ORGANISATION SOLUTIONS

PRACTICAL SHELVING SOLUTIONS

- Books look very similar (thin, softcover, similar artwork)
- Yet consists of different numbers, languages, genres
- Growing collection, have to add to it
- Hard to keep tidy
- Solution: Boxes with “spine labels” = keys to genres

USER EXPERIENCE IMPROVEMENTS

- Proof: isiNdebele, TshiVenda sorted
- Easy to navigate, understand
- QR code



ZULU	
Language (DARK GREEN)	
Basic Number	
896.3986	
Genres/Forms & Suffixes	Numbers
Poetry 1	896.39861
Drama 2	896.39862
Fiction 3	896.39863
Essays 4	896.39864
Speeches 5	896.39865
Letters 6	896.39866
Miscellaneous 8	896.39868

Please note that the number for a specific genre (form) is created by combining the basic number with the suffix for the specific genre, e.g. Zulu 896.3986 + poetry 1 = 896.39861

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION SOLUTIONS



HICCUPS

- Initial plans met with more challenges: frustration, demotivation
- Silo syndrome: reporting lines, KPAs, time management, prioritisation
- Not listed as a strategic project, but a practical solution

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION

- Meet, talk, problem-solve, agree to amend plan
- Books and boxes are all colour-coded
- Boxes have genre marked in red
- Books have mark on coloured label for genre & box #
- Improved communication results in a shared vision
- Practically agree to use WhatsApp for quick responses



BENEFITS OF A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

IMPROVED EFFICIENCY

- Collection easier to manage due to collaboration
- Smoother library operations
- Staff are less frustrated

USER-ORIENTED OUTCOME

- Users are less frustrated
- Users are invited to engage with staff via QR code
- More welcoming experience

EVOLVED INTO OTHER INITIATIVES

- Digitising theses and dissertations in African Languages
- Currently experimenting with machine translation of ETD abstracts





WAY AHEAD

SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

- Best practices created space for future additions

ONGOING COMMITMENT TO INCLUSIVITY

- User engagement and focus on inclusivity remain crucial to ensure relevance



CONCLUSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY INSIGHTS

- Improving access to the African Languages collection required problem analysis by a group of colleagues involved from different angles, to really understand the problem.
- Hard work in cataloguing and classification, shelving and re-shelving and collaboration proved key.

ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Look outside the norm to find a solution.
- Keep going until you find it. (We are on 3rd iteration!)



Image credit: Victoria Odoi-Atsem

Thank you.

Questions or discussion?



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