

The Canadian Language Librarians' Blog

Denis Lacroix

Library literature has been relatively silent on the topic of language librarianship. Is this silence an indication that fluency in selecting and finding resources in foreign languages or foreign countries is widespread? Or is language librarianship not yet considered a specialty?

Selecting resources for a foreign language library collection and helping patrons find information relating to literature in foreign languages – or data relating to the countries where those languages are spoken – require skills and knowledge that tap into the interdisciplinary and specialized realms of librarianship. This is one of the core roles of academic libraries, but language librarians need “to become more proactive and effective communicators” of their importance in academic research as it relates to foreign language materials.¹ Blogs help language librarians keep current of the diverse information resources that exist in their respective language areas and disseminate this knowledge to the greater public.

Lack of attention

In 1959, Ethelyn Johnson Roberts noted in her master's thesis that foreign “language competence... has been found of decided usefulness in librarianship.”² However, the

specialization of librarianship in “bibliographical techniques, [such as] selection, cataloguing, and reference”³ for foreign language materials has not received the same attention. Roberts also mentions that foreign languages such as French, German, Latin and Greek were considered prerequisites to librarianship at least since the first library school opened in 1886 at Columbia College.⁴

An indication of the place of languages in the education of future librarians also appears in the results of a survey of 56 School of Information and Library Science master's students conducted in 1999 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which identified the lack of courses in Foreign Language Librarianship (FLL) as a weakness.⁵ While Chapel Hill's School does not appear to have a course specifically on FLL, it does offer one on humanities and social sciences librarianship. Furthermore, Brian Vetruba reported that the University of South Florida's School of Library and Information Science, which “seeks to develop subject specialist librarians” through its Academic Librarians for Tomorrow's Academic Researchers (ALSTARS) program, announced a “shortage of subject and language specialists in the field.”⁶

In email communications in the spring of 2005, 80 of my Canadian foreign language counterparts unanimously supported the view that language librarians share common issues and information needs that are worth discussing and archiving.⁷ There already exists within the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) a website that regroups French speaking information professionals to provide them with an online communication hub.⁸ Similarly, when four language librarians, including me, met during CLA's June 2005 conference in Calgary, we asserted the importance of fostering communication between language librarians in order to complement professional expertise, foster dialogue, and shed light on the use of languages in library processes. The participants decided that a blog could serve as a forum that would encourage and support such communication.


Birth of a blog

The Canadian Language Librarians' Blog (CLLB)⁹ was born from WordPress, a free blog publishing platform that the University of Alberta Libraries now uses for its blogging needs.¹⁰ The blog creation process was simple and straightforward. It involved creating posting categories for the major language groups and

adding Internet links useful to the CLLB's visitors. The most complex aspect of creating a blog in WordPress was editing the cascading style sheet of the theme, Batavia 1.5, that I had already chosen from the platform's theme directory. (This ultimate step is not necessary, as one could simply make do with the original theme.)

CLLB visitors who wish to post messages need to register with the blog's administrator, obtain a username and password, and receive an authoring security level (from 1 to 10, where 10 assigns administrative privileges) in order to limit spam on the blog. Site users, other than the administrator, receive level 2 privileges, which only allow publishing to the blog. There are 13 registered authors so far on the CLLB.

The CLLB is a discussion forum for both public and academic Canadian language librarians, who share information about collection development, information literacy, reference work, and library technology or resources relating to foreign languages and literatures. If you'd like to participate in the CLLB and obtain a username and password, please send me an email (denis.lacroix@ualberta.ca).

The Canadian Language Librarians' Blog extends the benefits of the original CLA conference meeting to all librarians who have foreign language responsibilities, while addressing the Canadian context and issues specific to this type of librarianship. The blog is more than a current awareness tool – it is an advocacy forum for librarians in charge of foreign language materials. 



Notes

1. Patricia A. Kreitz, "Librarians as Knowledge Builders: Strategic Partnering for Service and Advocacy," *College and Research Libraries News*, vol. 65, no. 1 (January 2004), p. 8.
2. Ethelyn Johnson Roberts, "Foreign Language Specialization as a Recruitment Area for Librarianship," master's thesis (Atlanta, 1959), p. 22.
3. Ibid.
4. Johnson Roberts, "Foreign Language Specialization," p. 11.
5. School of Information and Library Science, "Appendix M: Student Opinions about the Curriculum," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://ils.unc.edu/daniel/COA/AppCurrSurv.html> (accessed May 1, 2006).
6. Brian Vetruba, "WESS in the News," *WESS Newsletter*, vol. 29, no.1 (Fall 2005), www.dartmouth.edu/~wessweb/nl/Fall05/wessnews.html (accessed May 1, 2006).
7. Forty-nine percent of the librarians contacted responded.
8. Sebastian Hierl, "Europe by Bits & Bytes," *WESS Newsletter*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Fall 2005), www.dartmouth.edu/~wessweb/nl/Fall05/bits.html (accessed May 1, 2006).
9. Canadian Language Librarians' Blog: A Discussion Forum for Canadian Language Librarians, <http://blogs.library.ualberta.ca/cll> (accessed May 1, 2006).
10. See <http://wordpress.org/> (accessed May 1, 2006).

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