

ANALYTIC BIBLIOGRAPHY, CONTENT AND GENRE ANALYSIS OF BIBLIOLOGIC LITERATURE IN ROMANIAN LIBRARIANSHIP PERIODICALS. 1990-1997

*Florina ILIȘ, István KIRÁLY, Angela MARCU
“Lucian Blaga” Central University Library*

I. Introduction

The aim of this research is to analyse Romanian bibliologic literature in librarianship periodicals. We are dealing with the period between 1990-1997, because this was a period of opening, chance and challenges from a historical point of view. The objectives of the research were not purely “epistemological”, exterior and generally valid. On the contrary, the authors of this paper were conscious from the very beginning that such an analysis does not only result in a “thesaurus” of information but also leads to authentic self-understanding.

Our research should therefore be called a “hermeneutics of Romanian bibliologic literature”, a hermeneutics on several levels which helps us understand the preoccupations and the state of this literature. We gathered data about it, signalling its deficiencies and tracking its potentialities. Although the majority of the steps – analytic bibliography, bibliometric method, content analysis – are at the disposal of every researcher, there were no investigations so far which assembled and directed them in the above mentioned hermeneutic way.

II. Research methodology

There were three basic ideas in our research methodology. The *first* is that every analytic bibliography which is in fact a database, lends itself to bibliometric analysis and content analysis. These analyses give extremely valuable supplementary information about the thematic structure of the database in question,

moreover, they allow for the analysis of this literature (for example, they allow us to track the evolution of the frequency of a topic within the time period studied.) The *second* idea was that every database contains in fact “materials” with well-defined *epistemological features* which characterize the *level* and/or *way* of treatment of topics that were identified and included in the database with the help of indices or subject headings. We observed that these epistemologic features are dissociated and grouped from a logic and a pragmatic point of view and they turned into real *categories*. As such they ensured an independent principle for ordering certain bibliographic material (e.g. books, periodicals, types of periodicals), and, on the other hand, they lent themselves to well-defined (but not autonomous) subdivisions. (For example, studies are divided into empirical, conceptual and system studies). The third basic idea was the *principal independence* of thematic characteristics and level of treatment. This was based on the conviction that the “production of texts” (of any kind) meant for publication is a basic existential act which consists of the free choice of subject, the author(s) being responsible for this choice as well as the level of treatment. The level of treatment does not predetermine the subject matter, neither does the subject matter predetermine the level of treatment. Therefore the whole responsibility for the correlation between topic and level of treatment belongs to the author. In other words, this correlation *characterizes* and *qualifies* the authors.

This is the spirit in which our research dealt with Romanian bibliologic literature as it appears in librarianship periodicals. Therefore only national publications were investigated such as *Biblioteca* (Library), *Probleme de informare și documentare* (Information and Documentation), *Revista Bibliotecii Naționale* (The Review of the National Library), *Buletin ABIR* (ABIR Bulletin) and *Anuarul ABIR* (ABIR Yearbook).¹

¹ We could not take into account every issue. There are publications which are missing in blocks from Cluj libraries: some years of *Anuarul ABIR* and *Buletin ABIR*. This is probably symptomatic of their distribution. See also note 3.

Only author articles were taken into consideration, i.e. any work of any periodical which had one or more authors who assumed responsibility for a certain topic or a defined thematic complex. We did not include reviews, documents published by institutions and associations and unsigned material.

Every article was indexed by two headings: a *thematic* and a *genre* heading. Thematic (subject) headings were based on texts, and obtained according to the principle of literary validity. We took care of their controlled use. Subject headings were post-coordinated: 1. analytically (for the database) 2. synthetically (for statistic data processing). For example, the heading "Public libraries" contains materials about county, municipal, town and village libraries. Consequently, the system of the subject headings has an *a posteriori* character.

This feature of subject headings being formed *a posteriori* allows for their critical-hermeneutical use. It refers to the field of *experience* that is *common* for us and which confronts us with certain professional and situational problems. Of course, this confrontation urges us to *search for* these problems in the librarianship literature and if we do not find them, this negative information becomes an important feature of this literature. The "production of texts" meant for publication is an undertaking, therefore its *lack* compared to *existing problems* is qualifying.

Consequently, the database of Romanian bibliologic literature in librarianship periodicals in the years 1990-1997 was built according to these subject headings. Its printed version takes the form of an analytic bibliography.

Unlike subject headings, *genre* headings are constructed *a priori*. Every *a priori* construction takes into account the *pure possibility* of something, presented in its exhaustive articulation. Given the fact that we had to do with professional as well as special periodicals we *a priori* found in them the following typical genres of author articles: *chronicle, documentary synthesis, commentary, debate, study and essay*.

Genre headings were introduced and used according to certain definitions. Before giving their definition it is important to underline their hermeneutic significance. The *a priori* nature of

these headings does not mean that they do not have an existential nature. On the contrary, they show the way in which an existential *completes* a possibility prefigured *a priori*.

III. Definitions

1. The *chronicle* is the signalling or presentation of an event, process or initiative on the agenda and/or in process of development.

2. The *documentary synthesis* is the presentation of a problem or a determined problem complex in the form in which it appears analytically and synthetically in the literature in question; no research or personal point of view is added.

3. The *commentary* is the presentation and analysis of a process or problem, written on the margin of special literature and/or based on the experience of the author, containing the interpretation of this literature or problem.

4. The *debate* is a manifestation which initiates and/or participates in the *public discussion* of a theoretic and/or practical issue; it is a strong, argued *impulse* in order to clear and/or solve the issue in question.

5. The *study* is the detailed analysis of an issue, state or process, based on a special bibliography or *individual research* the *results* of which are presented theoretically and/or supported by facts.

6. The *essay* is an initiative in the free spirit of ordering, associating, explaining and interpreting data regarding an issue, and all this from a *personal* and often *individual point of view*, placing the problem in its different theoretic, intuitive and factual contexts, presented hypothetically and supported with arguments.

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We must add some observations to the list of these concepts and genre-headings as well as their definition:

- Regarding the *list*, we must say that it has an *exhaustive* nature. It has in view the *totality* of author articles in a certain peri-

odical publication. This means that *every* author article in *any* periodical publication belongs to *one* category of genre heading.

- The categories in the list are *exclusive*. They allow the registration of a unity in a *single* category¹.

- Starting from the simple towards the complex, the different stages of the list of genre headings represent the different *levels* of treatment in author articles.

- The categories in the list can have *subdivisions* depending on the generic specificity of the periodical that is, the literature subjected to hermeneutic bibliography. We have already mentioned the case of studies. It is clear that the other categories are also structured – from the point of view of their frequency and their interior – according to the specificity of periodicals which they are applied to.

- As we have already said, the table of categories goes from the simple to the complex. The series of concepts cross *two* existential levels. The first is predominantly a level of *mentality* (attitudes) and the second an *epistemological* level. The level of mentality focuses on the category of “debate”, because the debate is characterized by the existential “aspiration” of *problems* to appear in the field of public discourse. The *undertaking* of these problems is done by bringing them in the public sphere in the intellectual form of debates. Therefore the frequency of debates in a certain literature is an important indicator of the characteristics of *mental consistency* (and of strong character) and of the level of undertaking the problems encountered in this literature.

- The epistemological level coagulates round “studies”. It is the most elaborate and adequate level for presenting *truth-value*. Therefore the epistemological level of a literature is shown by the frequency of studies. It is natural that the analysis of the literature is based on the *weight* of these two genre headings, “debate” as an indicator of the *mental level* and “study” as the indicator of the *epistemological level* of the literature in question.

¹ See details in Rotariu Traian, *Curs de metode și tehnici de cercetare sociologică* (*Course of Sociological Research Methods and Techniques*), Cluj, 1994, p.120-144.

- The definitions of the categories on the list of genre headings are analytic and functional definitions. They become the *rules of application* of the notions in question. They must therefore be applied according to the definitions.

- Apparently, the appreciative nature of genre headings opens a large space for subjective interpretations. It is clear however that the article which does *not* contain the author's own research and has no research results presented and supported by arguments, cannot be called "study". The initiators and/or participants of debates usually state the reasons why they raise the issue in public. It is also clear that the description of happenings during an event is "chronicle" and the mapping of the literature of a subject without the contribution of the author is "documentary synthesis". It is evident that "commentary" is the exercise of professional "decency" (in the *noblest* sense of the word) written on the margin of bibliographies and/or the observation of a process. This does not mean of course that subjective factors could not be eliminated altogether from the process of indexing. This is otherwise an absurd expectation, just like the sterile conclusions of objectivist-positivist studies. Pragmatically speaking, the degree of subjective factors can be reduced to a level where it does not decisively influence the distribution of proportions.

Summing up, the hermeneutic way of such a research passes through the following stages: the first is the creation of a *database*. The second is the *bibliometric* and *content analysis* of this database. The third stage is the establishment of the *level of treatment*, that is, the existential (mental and hermeneutic) analysis of the database in question.

VI. The presentation and discussion of bibliometric data and content analysis

After their *synthetic* post-coordination which eases statistic data processing we obtained *fifteen* thematic headings. Table nr.1. shows the first ten, in the order of their weight (frequency) in librarianship literature.

From a thematic point of view the table shows a rather colourful picture of the main themes in the bibliologic literature of Romanian librarianship periodicals.

Table nr.1. Distribution of the first ten subject headings in the decreasing order of frequency

	Thematic heading	Frequency	Percentage	Total percentage
1	Public libraries	145	12.4	12.4
2	Libraries abroad	70	6	18.4
3	Library automation	62	5.3	23.7
4	Cult. personalities	58	5	28.7
5	Library reform	48	4.1	32.8
6	Classif. & Indexing	44	3.8	36.6
7	Reading	44	3.8	40.4
8	Inform. & docum.	41	3.5	43.9
9	Cultural history	41	3.5	47.4
10	Librarian & profess.	37	3.2	50.6

The first observation is that the first ten topics – 20% of the total headings – cover half (50.6%) of the articles. “*Public libraries*” is in the first place, after post-coordination. We must also mention the interest of this literature in libraries abroad (second place). *Library automation* (third place) is also topical and therefore frequent in this literature. The preoccupation with *Cultural personalities* (nr.4.) and *Cultural history* (nr.9.) statistically shows the otherwise natural interest in cultural issues. *Library reform* (nr.5.) is an ample process which affects all structures of the profession in process of modification. *Clas-*

sification and indexing (nr.6.) as well as *Information and documentation* (nr.8.) are the technical aspects of the profession which, together with *Library automation* became the most dynamic fields.

Reading (nr.7.) attains the meaning and sense of being of the profession, *Librarianship profession* (nr.10.) is one of the constant and preferential preoccupations of authors.

However, the *real* significance of these statistic data will be revealed in a deeper analysis. We are going to do this with the help of Appendix nr.2. which shows the distribution of the yearly frequency of articles with the first ten topics.

The data of this table show a variation of frequencies; in most of the cases we cannot point out *tendencies* or *trends*.

Nevertheless the preoccupation with *Public libraries*, although it varies, increases towards the end of the period studied. The interest in *Libraries abroad* decreases within the time period. Despite variations *Library automation* remains a constant theme in this literature, showing a slight tendency of increase. This also holds good to *Cultural personalities*: except a sudden increase (29.3%) in 1992 which we will discuss later, this is a constant theme with a slight increase.

Library reform shows a peculiar distribution in time. After a peak in 1990 (29.2%) it decreased suddenly and despite certain variations remained on a low level until 1997 when it increased again to 25%. Taking into account the *importance* of this theme we think it necessary to find an explanation for this phenomenon.

The first explanatory *hypothesis* is that this literature depends on *external*, sometimes *political* factors. Therefore the first post-revolutionary year and the first elections offered adequate conditions for problemising reform in general and the reform of libraries in particular. Shortly after that librarianship literature came to a *state of expectation*, waiting for the outlining and strengthening of strategies by political factors. In the year 1992, just after the elections, there were very few articles on this general and central theme; "cultural" issues which have a certain neutrality were mostly published in this year: *Cultural*

personalities (29.3%) and *Cultural history* (53.7%) which do not reach the core of the profession. This warns us about a *hypothetical* lack of *mental autonomy* of librarianship literature because library reform did not lose importance in the meantime. Only this literature did not autonomously and constantly undertake this topic on the level of its existential importance.

Classification and indexing also fluctuates without an identifiable tendency in time. *Reading* as a general theme shows a slight but constant decrease after 1992 (36.4%).

Information and documentation together with *Cultural history* are the only topics which disappeared altogether after 1993 and 1995, respectively. *Information and documentation* shows a slight decrease in 1990-1993; it returned in 1994 and continued with fluctuations until the end of the period (their explanation deserves more detailed study). *Cultural history* increased substantially in 1990-1992, reaching a constant value of 7.3%.

Librarianship profession showed a decrease in 1990-1992 (18.9% and 2.7%), moderately increasing (it becomes stable in 1994-1996, 13.5%). There was a sudden increase in 1997 (21.6%).

Summing up, we can say that Romanian bibliologic literature in periodicals does not have considerable tendencies of modification (evolution or involution) in its most important topics in the time period studied.

This conclusion might be surprising and it must warn us because this is a period of *historical chance* and the majority of the topics identified as predominant are really important for grasping this opportunity.

Besides this, the destiny of the *Library reform* topic is the most important critical warning. Romanian librarianship literature does not have an organic and autonomous concept and project of reforming its institutions and therefore its thematic *articulations* cannot be oriented towards problemising construction. This also explains the fact that the topic of *Librarianship profession* is permanently and obsessively maintained, perhaps unconsciously.

We cannot stop at these conclusions: they have urged us to deepen our analysis and have a look at the *level* of treatment of the main themes of this literature. Our investigation is based on the following Appendix Nr.3 which correlates main topics with *genre headings*.

A glance at this table reveals the preponderance of “chronicles” and “commentaries”.

Within the theme of *Public libraries* there is a percentage of 96% of chronicles, documentary syntheses and commentaries. Only 2.8% of the author articles could be considered “debates” and only 0.7% studies. As concerns *Libraries abroad* there were no debates altogether which is surprising because we must admit hypothetically that dealing with libraries abroad leads naturally to the debate of possibilities and lines of evolution in our libraries as compared to different Western trends.

It is also surprising that such a topical, central and *technical* theme as *Library automation* is written about in chronicles, documentary syntheses and commentaries (86%); debates have a percentage of 3.1% and studies 6.2%.

The more than 98% of chronicles and commentaries about *Cultural personalities* show the *nature* of the attraction of librarianship literature towards “cultural” themes. We must advance the hypothesis that a spirit of superficial mass “culturalisation” of librarians still survives in the articles published in *Biblioteca*.

The percentage of chronicles and commentaries about *Library reform* was approximately 83%. However, there were no documentary syntheses which were so important because they could inform us about similar experiences. The absence of studies supports our former hypothesis about the lack of autonomous conceptions of reform. Still, the percentage of debates (16.7%) is a good sign.

Classification and indexing was most intensely studied, there are 25% studies in the total number of articles in this field. It is followed by *Information and documentation* (19.5%).

The domination of “chronicles” and “commentaries” characterizes the main topics but also the whole of librarianship literature. The following table (nr.2.) shows this situation.

Table nr. 2. Distribution of articles according to genre headings

	Genre heading	Frequency	Percentage	Total percentage
1	Commentary	710	60.8	60.8
2	Chronicle	291	24.9	85.7
3	Study	78	6.7	92.4
4	Debate	66	5.7	98.1
5	Docum.synthesis	18	1.5	99.6
6	Essay	5	0.4	100

The table shows clearly that this literature is dominated by commentaries (60.8%) which together with chronicles and documentary syntheses cover a percentage of 87.2% of the total number of articles. The extremely reduced number of studies (6.7%) and debates (5.7%) is worrying and questions the mental and epistemological value of this literature. Even allowing for the subjective element in the creation of these percentages we do not think that they influenced the great differences in proportions in a decisive way.

Before giving details let us consider the *most often debated* themes in this literature:

Table nr.3. Themes with the highest percentage of **debate**

	Frequency	Topic
1	11	The sociology of reading
2	8	Library reform
3	6	Librarianship profession
4	4	Public libraries, Collection development, Bibliologic education
5	5	Special libraries, Library legislation

The table as well as the whole issue of the presence of debates in this literature requires further thought and explanation. First of all we must say that if we take into account the *meaning* of the term “debate”, a *generic type* of the level of treatment of a problem by an author, then the number of debates in Romanian librarianship periodicals is *even more reduced* than our statistics show.

In fact, there is no *polemic* in this literature, ideas, arguments and projects are not publicly confronted in it. It is dominated by an odious, narrow-minded and suspect unanimity. We can observe the lack of critical spirit, critical reasoning being reduced to lamentations and supplications addressed to MPs. Therefore we had to include under the heading “debate” solitary and timid opinions that had no echo, acts becoming initiative gestures *signaling* only the importance of the issue in the public sphere of the profession. We also included quasi-sociological surveys which, besides the assertion of the problem also published the data obtained.

The analysis of data about the themes which have the greatest number of *studies* also lead to important observations. The following table (nr.6.) shows first of all that some of these studies were written on more special topics, that is, they are the contribution of *specialists* (IT specialists, mathematicians, engineers, sociologists) whose field is other than (classical) librarianship. They are those who can write studies.

Table nr. 4. Topics with the greatest number of studies

	Frequency	Topics
1	11	Classification
2	8	Information-Documentation
3	7	Documentary collections
4	6	Bibliometry, Library history, The sociology of reading
5	5	The history of books
6	4	Library automation, Centres of information, Collection development
7	3	Reading

Secondly, the relatively high frequency of studies in fields such as *Documentary collections*, *Library history* and the *History of books* which belong to the traditional field of bibliology, suggests the hypothesis that they were written by those librarians who *did not move away from their initial specialization* (historian, philosopher, sociologists) during their career. They had the power – and the chance – of maintaining contact with their profession. They are also capable of writing studies.

However, these aspects should be analyzed carefully. The question arises whether the low frequency of debates and studies in this literature is the result of the *editorial policy* of the few periodicals in this field¹. Does this express the general domination of a strong trend imposed by certain opinion leaders who do not allow for “other voices” in librarianship publications? Or is this the *real* level of the profession?

These are essential questions which require studies and debates but which, despite the permanent presence of the topic *Librarianship profession*, are missing from this literature. The studying of these issues and their serious public debating is vital for changing the level and state of this profession.

This is the main hermeneutic conclusion of our study. Otherwise, we are convinced that the image of Romanian bibliologic literature in librarianship periodicals as we presented was *honest*. But it is our conviction that *it should be different!* Our profession still and already has enough creative power to authenticate itself. But “something must be changed”. Everything must be oriented in function of *values* and *skills*.

Finally, we think that our study convincingly shows the use, importance and value of the methodology presented at the beginning. We underline that hermeneutics is its essence and core. It must of course be nuanced and extended. It must be extended

¹ Besides the mental and epistemological level of these periodicals, the distribution of some of them is also problematic. The fact that some publications of ABIR cannot be found in the territorial branches or in the copyright library questions their meaning and the consistency of their edition.

comparatively, in the interior as well as the exterior.

In the interior, it is important to analyse this literature in the period 1985-1989 in order to see what has really changed and what has tacitly survived in its depths. The analysis of the 1968-1972 literature would make us conscious about Ceaușescan losses.

The thematic interest of this literature in libraries abroad would gain consistency if other bibliologic literatures were also studied. We do not refer to the “great literatures” on the toplist of professional tourism but the librarianship literature of neighboring countries who are facing *similar* problems.

Appendix nr.1. Distribution of articles in function of the first ten **subject headings** and **year of publication**

Appendix nr. 2. Distribution of articles in function of **subject headings** (first ten) and **genre headings**

Appendix nr.1. Distribution of articles in function of the first ten **subject headings** and **year of publication**

Year	1990		1991		1992		1993		1994		1995		1996		1997		Total	
Subject Heading	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Public libraries	6	4.1	8	5.5	38	26.2	8	5.5	10	6.9	16	11	33	22.8	26	17.9	145	12.4
Libraries abroad	15	21.4	6	8.6	14	20	6	8.6	8	11.4	4	5.7	8	11.4	9	12.9	70	6
Library automation	7	11.3	12	19.4	4	6.5	4	6.5	6	9.7	11	17.7	7	11.3	11	17.7	62	5.3
Cultural personalities	5	8.6	7	12.1	17	29.3	6	10.3	8	13.8	5	8.6	2	3.4	8	13.8	58	5
Library reform	14	29.2	4	8.3	1	2.1	3	6.3	6	12.5	5	10.4	3	6.3	12	25	48	4.1
Classification, indexing	7	15.9	3	6.8	6	13.6	2	4.5	9	20.5	5	11.4	9	20.5	3	6.8	44	3.8
Reading	9	20.5	4	9.1	16	36.4	4	9.1	4	9.1	3	6.8	2	4.5	2	4.5	44	3.8
Information, documentation	14	34.1	7	17.1	4	9.8	-	-	3	7.3	2	4.9	7	17.1	4	9.8	41	3.5
Cultural history	2	4.9	5	12.2	22	53.7	3	7.3	3	7.3	-	-	3	7.3	3	7.3	41	3.5
Librarianship profession	7	18.9	2	5.4	1	2.7	4	10.8	5	13.5	5	13.5	5	13.5	8	21.6	37	3.2

Appendix nr.2. Distribution of articles in function of **subject headings** (first ten) and **genre headings**

	Genre headings	Chronicle		Docum. synthesis		Commentary		Debate		Study		Essay		Total	
	Subject Heading	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	Public libraries	59	40,7	1	0,7	80	55,2	4	2,8	1	0,7	-	-	145	12,4
2	Libraries abroad	28	40	1	1,4	40	57,1	-	-	1	1,4	-	-	70	6
3	Library automation	10	15,4	1	1,5	45	69,2	2	3,1	4	6,2	-	-	65	5,3
4	Cultural personalities	12	20,7	-	-	45	77,6			1	1,7	-	-	58	5
5	Library reform	10	20,8	-	-	30	62,5	8	16,7	-	-	-	-	48	4,1
6	Classification, indexing	5	11,4	1	2,3	25	56,8	2	4,5	11	25	-	-	44	3,8
7	Reading	1	2,3	1	2,3	37	84,1	2	4,5	3	6,8	-	-	44	3,8
8	Information, documentation	6	14,6	1	2,4	25	61	1	2,4	8	19,5	-	-	41	3,5
9	Cultural history	5	12,2	-	-	32	78	-	-	1	2,4	3	7,3	41	3,5
10	Librarianship profession	7	18,9	1	2,7	22	59,5	6	16,2	1	2,7	-	-	37	3,2