

Incorporating subject headings for Indigenous peoples of North America/First Nations

Presenters

- Stacy Allison-Cassin, PhD, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto
- Adolfo R. Tarango, Head, UBC Library Technical Services; Acting Head, Asian Library, The University of British Columbia

Presentation summary

Stacy Allison-Cassin discussed Improving access through culturally appropriate application of terminology. Such terminology has to be respectful and is tied to human rights, in particular to the United Nation's Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The naming of peoples, places, and cultures does more than provide access points to materials but is connected to the way those materials are considered within our systems, and how people come in and interact and are recognized within those systems.

Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) presents its own problems with the added concern that over-standardizing headings means that local and traditional knowledge systems are being crowded out. There has been work to address this, especially in Canada, by building ontologies in the context of truth and reconciliation to assist libraries.

Adolfo R. Tarango presented Authority work, names, and vocabulary: an indigenous centered approach. He provided a case-study of how some of the ideas Stacy just discussed might be applied. He touched on how The University of British Columbia approaches authority work and how the Xwi7xwa Library applies names of nations and makes use of an indigenous and community-centered vocabulary. Finally, he went over that specialized vocabulary they use, illustrating how they developed it with specific examples.

URLs mentioned during the presentation:

[Canadian Federation of Library Associations \(CFLA-FCAB\). Committee on Indigenous Matters](#)

[CFLA-FCAB Truth & Reconciliation Committee Report & Recommendations](#)

[United Nation's Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings Related to Indigenous Peoples: for use in the AMA \[Association of Manitoba Archives\] MAIN \[Manitoba Archival Information Network\] Database](#)

[Indigenous Knowledge Management: Indigenous Subject Headings - AMA LCSH](#)

[Xwi7xwa Library](#) The University of British Columbia [Library catalog](#)

[Report of the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens", includes an appendix on approaches libraries have taken to changing the headings \(or their display\) in their local systems.](#)

[Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee: A Code of Ethics for Catalogers](#)

[First Nations, Metis and Inuit – Indigenous Ontologies \(FNMIIO\)](#)

[Change the Subject \(2019\)](#)

[Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus Project](#)

OCLC created outputs on the topic about subject headings for Indigenous people:

- Recent research findings – summary of interviews with catalogers and others on this topic: [Towards respectful and inclusive description](#)
- OCLC Research Webinars
 - The University of Toronto Libraries is reckoning with both cultural change and the development of culturally appropriate metadata on a system-wide scale [Dynamics of change—continuing the conversation on library naming, finding, and relationship-building with Indigenous peoples](#)
 - How the Association for Manitoba Archives and the University of Alberta Libraries began the processes of examining subject headings and classification schemes as they relate to Indigenous people [Decolonizing Descriptions: Finding, Naming and Changing the Relationship between Indigenous People, Libraries and Archives](#)
 - Dr. Kimberly Christen traces the often-violent histories of collecting and the construction of the public domain, unpack their connections to the foundations of libraries and archives, and open a space to provide a framework for ethical engagements and reciprocal practices through culturally responsive tools and engagements. ["We Have Never Been Neutral: Search, Discovery, and the Politics of Access"](#)
 - Learn how the CARE Principles help address the historical legacy of data inequities that impact Indigenous Peoples. [Operationalizing the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#)
- WebJunction Webinar: [Strengthen Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Practice Through Self-Paced Learning](#)

Member Questions

Have any of the working groups generated a list of problematic LCSH headings that we should be working to replace with better headings?

Answer (Stacy): I think there are some well-known headings and I think the question, or maybe the answer that we have had is whether... what can be done through changing LC terminology and then what can be done ...on the local level implementation, in changing headings at the local level. I think there are always the 2 paths especially if the LC route isn't something that may be productive.

Answer continued (Adolfo): Just to echo your comment, this work is the most effective, I think, if we get the work done upstream. So, if we can correct the LCSH heading that would be the preferred thing, then that, because of the nature of LCSH and its predominance than that would filter out to everybody.

Absent that, then we are stuck doing local fixes, which, depending on whether you are an OCLC member or not, you have to take different approaches for how you have to manage that. Again, the issue being, especially in large academic libraries that are trying to engage in this work, is it's always a challenge to decide what you are going to do locally vs all the processes that you set up to streamline your cataloging operations, like automatic authority control, which potentially could undo the work you are trying to do. So, it's really challenging... it's some of the things we need to tackle as we have these conversations.

Will these indigenous subject headings be included into authorized Canadian subject headings?

Answer (Stacy): With the Canadian subject headings... so part of the work is for the task group, partnering also with the Library and Archives of Canada, to find a pathway to the Canadian subjects headings because with this shift to OCLC there were some issues with... like the future of Canadian subjects headings, so that's something we're working on. I know that Library and Archives of Canada is working on as well. That's work that's starting right now.

One issue with not having universal terms is the fact that most small libraries (which would include libraries serving these communities in many cases) do not have the time/staff to consistently edit subject headings to whatever is appropriate for their area. Is there a plan for a more acceptable range of headings that can be used in addition to developing local vocabularies?

Answer (Stacy): I think it's a real tension, obviously, in our need to have a local context but also recognizing the need to have more of a national viewpoint or universal viewpoint, if I can use that word. So, this is one of those strategies with the Joint Task Group to both develop the headings and also pathways for people to be able to do implementations so that it's not so much work on the local level we know. So many organizations don't have the capacity to be changing local headings all the time. And so really, I think as Adolfo said ... maybe it's upstream to try to relieve some of that pressure but also ensuring that people know that they do have to reflect their local context. I think that's the part that we want to stress as well. Adolfo spoke very well about the context in British Columbia and that's something that's really important to have reflected. So also, to just do that work of understanding your local context and your local community to know maybe even when there is an appropriate heading that's been published that you do think about is that even appropriate for my library or space.

My library only authorizes us to use LCSH. Do you know if there is more movement with Lib of Congress to change these Eurocentric headings?

Answer (Adolfo): LCSH is doing the best they can within the process that they have set up for review of headings. And so, people, of course, are welcome to submit changes to LCSH and the Library of Congress will go through their process of editorial review. Unfortunately, the Library of Congress reports to Congress and the current political situation is such that there's actually been legislation prohibiting Congress from changing certain headings and limiting to what terminology they can use. So, it is problematic. LC has a difficult situation right now in particular. So, while that avenue is available, we need to understand that the Library of Congress reports to Congress, not unfortunately, to the public and to constituents, where like other countries it is not the national library it is the Library of Congress.

Stacy mentioned the Indian Act. What are some legislative initiatives in Canada that are helping to facilitate reclassification?

Answer (Stacy): One thing I did mention at the top of my presentation is the United Nation's Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Canada has endorsed this, the government of Canada, in 2016. They have said in December of 2020 that they are going to introduce legislation to implement this Declaration. So, it is that kind of legislation where we can see the ability to connect up that legislation with greater force in terms of recognizing the importance of indigenous headings, or classification, or appropriate access to materials through various places like Library and Archives of Canada or Heritage, or other places by having appropriate headings. So, there are things that are potentially coming into force, whether or not the government actually, so far, has not implemented it in a way that we've seen that changes the government level, I don't think, but someone else may have different information

Many projects like these are limited by jurisdictional boundaries like countries, provinces, etc. How does the CFLA subject heading project address Indigenous groups from the geographic perspective? Are there plans to reach past Canada, for example?

Answer (Stacy): Yes, of course indigenous nations are not restricted by the Canadian/US borders. We proceed with the formation of that border, so right now the community list is primarily tied to recognized communities in terms of things like reserves, or communities in Nunavut but we have not yet tackled the wider issue of nations. But this is something we have talked about in definitions of nationhood. We have talked about implementing in the context of linked data where we would also be able to have ties to geographic areas, overlapping kinds of territories, and certainly recognizing that the concept of nationhood within data is really, really important.

In the US, we have the issue of different orthographies between different Bands of the same tribal nations. How did you decide on the endonyms? Was there outreach, checking First Nations' government websites? I'd love to know the process for this.

Answer (Adolfo): I can speak to the work at [Xwi7xwa Library](#), yes, that First Nations' websites are one of our first resources for looking at how they represent themselves. But even that may not necessarily give us a clear indication because they can use different orthography even on their own website. So, there's a lot of community outreach to try to figure out which ones we prefer, and that's really the work. So, what you see with regards to the list that we're using for the British Columbia First Nations is the result of a lot of that work. I will note that we do not consider that list static because we fully expect that it will change over time as those conversations happen within those bands themselves, right? They may decide differently at different points. So, all we can do in those cases is just keep track of all the variables, and do the best we can in consultation with them, to use the form that they prefer, assuming there is one, and then going from there.

@Adolfo: Will you consider using <vernacular scripts> (provided the code is available) in addition to the Latin script in variant name field? If unavailable, is a different platform, e.g. Wikidata, a possibility?

Participant Comments: Within NACO, aboriginal syllabics are not permitted as they are not part of MARC-8. This is not a possibility within the NACO record, right now.

Answer (Adolfo): That is correct. What we've done locally at UBC is to use Voyager to code the script. Voyager is the ILS we that use. We can enter almost all the syllabics. I think it's only 3 we were unable

to actually code in Voyager. So, if you look in our catalog you will see the vernacular for wherever we have them. That's something that is included in Voyager ILS, others I'm not sure what you can do in those situations.

Participant Comment: However, an 024 could link to Wikidata which could use different scripts. That is another thing that the lifting of the 024 moratorium can help with.

Is there a plan to make the First Nations House of Learning Thesaurus open to the public after data clean up?

Answer (Adolfo): There is a plan but as Stacy mentioned the terms that we come up with may not necessarily be applicable to your local situation. That is one of the biggest challenges in coming up with a thesaurus. That's part of our hesitation actually to make it public right now. We still need to go through our terms and make sure that they're still appropriate, even within our local context. We've already identified several terms that 10 years ago were appropriate but now are totally inappropriate. And so that work is ongoing. And, again, we do at some point want to feel comfortable enough and confident enough that at least it reflects some degree of what is appropriate. There will always be a sort of asterisk over this thesaurus that your local practice may vary. Again, the challenges of working with many, many, many groups that have many, many different perspectives. Stacy, do you want to add to that?

Answer (Stacy): Yeah, there was a question I just want to loop back to. So Wikidata has been something our group has been looking at and is certainly something I have been examining in terms of syllabics but also something we've explored, and also using open government data as a thesaurus for potential names. That's something that can be loaded, for example, into Wikidata or Wikibase Instance. But also, something that we've talked about in terms of the ontology is developing a workflow allowing community contributions. And having a more open system is one of the problems with the system we're using right now. The Library of Congress headings are very static, they're very hard to change those terms, there's resistance as Adolfo mentioned. And working outside the bounds of that is potentially more responsive. And so perhaps part of the effort is not necessarily in changing the Library of Congress headings, although that would be the ideal, but also ensuring that we have the abilities to use alternate vocabularies easily within our library systems.

Answer (Adolfo): Something I'd like to add, that Stacy as she was talking reminded me of ... one of the challenges that we have is our current systems. You basically have one term that you can use. That's just the way our systems are set-up. One of the promises of the linked data environment is the potential to be able to use different terms depending on your context. In theory in a linked data environment we can say use all the terms that are appropriate, and each community can decide to use whichever term they want. There is in that sense no preference for one over the other, but the linked data allows a connection between all those different terms. So, to me, that's one of the things that I look forward to in a linked data environment to be able to take advantage of.

The Q&A for the live Session concluded here. A few additional questions asked in chat are answered below:

Adolfo, what are some ways you keep the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) Thesaurus updated?

Answer: A: Staff working at Xwi7xwa Library work daily with Indigenous students, faculty, and community members, so that is our first direct link to the terminology used. The Xwi7xwa Library supports and works closely with the First Nations House of Learning, a centre that support Indigenous students and faculty and is a resource for Indigenous communities. That relationship permits further connections that support the development of the thesaurus. And of course, we have the rich collections of the Xwi7xwa Library that serve as a direct source.

Can Adolfo say again the name of the Thesaurus loading program being used?

Answer: A: MultiTes: <http://www.multites.com/>

Would love to hear more about how / when work to modified LCSH term will be applied elsewhere in Canada.

Answer: No answer supplied.

Where can librarians find the First Names House of Learning Thesaurus?

Answer: A: Unfortunately, it is not currently available to the public and will not be until we complete our internal review and associated clean-up and have vetted it with at least our local Indigenous communities.

Certainly, it would be great to see a lot of SACO proposals done by people with the right expertise.

Answer: No answer supplied

I think I understood that FNHL Thesaurus is not available for public consultation. Are you able to share a working version from Multi-tes?

Answer: A: Not at this time, see response to previous question above.

Adolfo when do you expect the thesaurus to be online?

Answer: A: Unfortunately, we cannot specify a timeline.

Stacy (or Adolfo as well): would you speak more to what the consultation process with indigenous communities is like?

Answer: No answer supplied

Would you give us some examples that you tried to submit to SACO to enhance LCSH but were unsuccessful?

Answer: A: UBC has not submitted any.

Any recommendations for how to start a similar process in our local area?

Answer: No answer supplied

Participant Comment: I would contact your local Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to talk to them about processes for gathering Indigenous information, including naming practices

Lots of descriptive metadata is created outside of libraries, e.g., by publishers and vendors. What outreach has there been to such organizations to address these issues?

Answer: Adolfo: I am not aware of any such efforts. I can see this might be very challenging given that the majority of the materials we collect at Xwi7xwa Library come from small publishers and community groups struggling to just publish their materials, let alone have the resources to create the associated metadata or create or maintain the technological infrastructure to work with vendors.

Comment from a LAC staff member: LAC has generated a list of headings related to indigenous peoples in CSH and review and update these headings in stages.

Comment from an attendee: Regarding local headings, it might also be possible to create a Macro book that can edit the existing terms and can be set to different vocabularies based on geographic areas.

It would be nice to see more guidelines coming from Core SAC group in regarding the suggested use of alternative terms to replace these non-inclusive terms, not just for "Illegal aliens", but subject headings related to other areas such as LGBTQ+.

Participant answer: contact the chair of SAC

To better understand this process: are there reasons for the local name changes vary may not be readily understood by the group?

Answer: [No answer supplied]