“About” is what it’s about!
The state of subject access

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she/her/hers
Outline

• Subject analysis and subject access
• “About” and “aboutness”
• Types of subject terms
• IFLA Library Reference Model and RDA
• Ethics, diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice
• Subject Analysis Committee
Subject analysis and subject access

• **Subject analysis**
  • Act of determining the topic of the resource being described.

• **Subject access**
  • Providing the means to discover a resource by assigned subject terms.
  • The intended outcome of subject analysis.
“About”

What is it about? A preposition.

- **Oxford English Dictionary**
  - “Concerning, regarding, with regard to, in reference to; in the matter of.”
  - “To have as subject matter, to be concerned with.”

- **Cambridge English Dictionary**
  - The most common meaning of *about* as a preposition is ‘on the subject of’ or ‘connected with’

- **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**
  - with regard to
  - concerned with
  - fundamentally concerned with or directed toward
“About”

• “Is”
  • Physical characteristic of a work.
  • Often form or genre

• “Of”
  • Information depicted in a work.
  • Not necessarily the topic of the work.
Types of subject terms

- Controlled vocabularies
- Keywords
- Natural language
- Facets
Types of subject terms
Controlled vocabularies

- **Familiar controlled vocabularies in MARC bib records**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LCSH</td>
<td>Library of Congress Subject Headings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCGFT</td>
<td>Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCMPT</td>
<td>Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeSH</td>
<td>Medical Subject Headings (National Library of Medicine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAT</td>
<td>Art and Architecture Thesaurus (Getty Research Institute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAST</td>
<td>Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (OCLC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of subject terms
Keywords, natural language

• Keywords

• Natural language
  • “Uncontrolled” terms and phrases that are often up to date and nuanced within a discipline or research area.
Types of subject terms
Facets
IFLA Library Reference Model and RDA

- IFLA Library Reference Model (LRM)
  - https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11412
  - FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records)
  - FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data)
  - FRSAD (Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data)

- Resource Description and Access (RDA)
  - https://www.rdatoolkit.org
  - No subject-related guidance, except for Timespan and Place
Ethics

- Ethics, diversity, inclusion, social justice
  - Immigration status
  - Race
  - Gender
  - Indigenous/native populations
Ethics
“Illegal aliens”

- SAC reports
  - Report from the SAC Working Group on the LCSH “Illegal aliens”
    - https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/9261 (July 2016)
  - Report from the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH “Illegal aliens”
    - https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/14582 (June 2020)

- Change the Subject (2019)
  - https://www.library.dartmouth.edu/digital/digital-collections/change-the-subject
Ethics

“Illegal aliens”

• Local remediation:
• OhioLINK
  • Guidelines for Addressing Outdated or Offensive Subject Terms
    • https://www.ohiolink.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/Guidelines_for_Outdated_Terms_FINAL.pdf
Ethics

African Americans (LCSH)

LC control no.: sh 85001932
LCCN Permalink: https://lccn.loc.gov/sh85001932
LC classification: E184.5 E185.98

Topical subject heading: African Americans

Variant(s): African Americans --United States
Afro-Americans
Black Americans
Colored people (United States)
Negroes

See also: Africans --United States
Ethnology --United States
Blacks --United States

subdivision African Americans under individual wars, e.g. World War, 1939-1945--African Americans; and headings beginning with African American

Scope note: Here are entered works on citizens of the United States of black African descent. Works on blacks who temporarily reside in the United States, such as aliens, students from abroad, etc., are entered under Blacks--United States. Works on blacks outside the United States are entered under Blacks--[place].

Subject example tracing: Example under United States--Race relations
Note under Blacks--United States

Invalid LCCN: sj 96004705
Ethics

Toward remediation

• Race (example):
  • Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia:
    https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf

• Gender, LGBTQ (example):
  • Homosaurus:
    • http://homosaurus.org
Ethics
Toward remediation

- Indigenous/native populations:
  - Libraries and Archives Canada:

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in metadata practices: the example of Jo Mora’s ‘Indians of North America’ (blog post):
Opportunities for participation

• SACO:
  • Main page: https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/index.html
  • Funnels: https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/funnels.html

• Subject Analysis Committee:
  • http://www.ala.org/core/member-center/sections/metadata-and-collections/subject-analysis-committee
Opportunities for participation

• Authority Control Interest Group:
  • http://www.ala.org/core/member-center/interest-groups/authority-control

• Faceted Subject Access Interest Group:
  • http://www.ala.org/core/member-center/interest-groups/faceted-subject-access
Thank you!

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