

Called to Act

Decolonizing Description Beyond Consultation

Gisele Ramgoolam, Norquest College

Brian Stearns, University of Alberta

Co-Chairs, Decolonizing Description Working Group

NEOS Miniconference

3 June 2021

Overview

- Decolonizing Description Working Group formed in 2020
 - Supports the current NEOS strategic agenda, which aims to encourage progress towards decolonization and Indigenization
 - Responds to questions from member libraries about developing more respectful subject headings for Indigenous topics
 - Responsibilities of working group are significant:
 - Determine what subject headings should be implemented, based on the University of Alberta Library community consultations
 - Determine the technical requirements for implementation
 - Develop processes for continuing work (ensuring new subject headings are evaluated, ensuring local subject headings are included in new catalogue records, working with vendors to automate work)
 - Develop proposals for search and display options in discovery systems
 - Develop necessary training and policy changes

- University of Alberta Library consultations were performed at a broad level
 - Specific suggestions included:
 - Indians of North America should be Indigenous peoples (with appropriate geographic subdivision)
 - Aboriginal should be Indigenous
 - Eskimo should be Inuit
 - Indian/Indians should be First Nations
 - Native/Native peoples should be Indigenous/Indigenous peoples
 - Riel Rebellion should be Riel Resistance
 - Working group needs to interpret this at a granular level

- Our assumptions:
 - Meaningful consultation is necessary and our work is happening after that has occurred
 - We are developing an augmentation to *Library of Congress Subject Headings* rather than a new vocabulary, so terms and structure must be compatible
 - We are creating only English subject headings
 - Indigenous peoples should be treated the same as non-Indigenous peoples (i.e., if a subject heading would not be created for another ethnic group, it should not be created for an Indigenous group)
 - This work must continue locally as long as Library of Congress uses offensive terms in their subject headings
 - We are not evaluating individual catalogue records for appropriateness of subject headings
 - We want to share our work with other institutions, so reasons for decisions need to be documented

Work Plan

Completed work

- Survey member libraries to identify discovery systems and to determine preferences for the existing subject headings
 - Preference was to shadow the existing subject headings, so that the terms can be searched but are not displayed
- Develop technical specifications to identify affected catalogue records and automatically add the local subject headings
 - Ensures that new resources have the local subject headings
 - Duplicates subdivisions on the existing subject headings and adds them to the local subject headings (e.g., `Siksika Indians--History` becomes `Siksika people--History`)

Completed work

- Develop an acknowledgement statement for member libraries regarding offensive or harmful terms used in the catalogue:
 - “[Name of library] recognizes that our catalogue and resource descriptions contain language that reflects the biases, norms, and perspectives of the time in which they were created. In particular, for resources about persons and groups, this language is often outdated and harmful. These descriptions also incorporate controlled vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings, which include some headings (e.g., Indians of North America), that are offensive or inappropriate. We use international standards for description, but support and actively participate in efforts to update and change these practices as we strive for descriptions that are inclusive, respectful, and do not cause harm. We acknowledge the critical importance of community consultation in these efforts, and as residents on [relevant land, e.g., Treaty 6 territory and Métis Region 4] we commit to working together with our local communities to make these changes.”

Completed work

- Request from Library of Congress the obsolete instruction sheet about assigning subject headings for Indigenous peoples
 - Correct obsolete subject heading constructions in the local catalogue (e.g., Cree Indians--Children becomes Cree children)
 - Identify additional subject headings that exist only with obsolete construction to add to our work

Continuing work

- Identify inappropriate subject headings and determine their replacements:
 - Search for subject headings and record them in our spreadsheet
 - Search “Aboriginal”, “Indian”, “Indigenous”, “Native”, and their plurals
 - Search the names of groups and languages
 - Searches are conducted in *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, *Canadian Subject Headings*, *Répertoire de vedettes-matière* and in the local catalogue
 - Each subject heading is assigned a category: “Indians”, etc. (e.g., Indians of Mexico); Group (e.g., Algonquin Indians); Language (e.g., Chilliwack dialect); Associated concept (e.g., Moccasins)
 - Categorize derivative subject headings (e.g., Inuktitut poetry) separately
 - Each group subject heading is assigned its geographical region
 - Four cataloguers worked on this step; nearly 6000 subject headings were identified

Continuing work

- Identify inappropriate subject headings and determine their replacements:
 - Determine resolution for subject headings and propose changes
 - Each subject heading is assigned an action: accept, substitute (for a one-to-one change), cancel, modify (for complex changes), establish (for unestablished subject headings), or further evaluation required (for complicated subject headings)
 - Record the proposed local subject heading and whether research is necessary and has been completed
 - Six cataloguers are working on this step

A2

fx

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Category	L.C.S.H. term	C.S.H. term	R.V.M. term	Consulted	Action	Researcher
2	Associated concepts		Amnesty Question, 1869-1875	Question de l'Amnistie, Canada, 1869-187	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Associated concepts	Batoche, Battle of, Batoche, Sask., 1885		Bataille de Batoche, Batoche, Sask., 1885	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Associated concepts		Battleford (Sask.)--History--Destruction, 18	Battleford (Sask.)--Histoire--1885 (Destruc	<input type="checkbox"/>	Further evalu	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Associated concepts		Cut Knife Hill, Battle of, Sask., 1885	Bataille de Cut Knife Hill, Sask., 1885	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Associated concepts		Duck Lake, Battle of, Sask., 1885	Bataille du Lac au Canard, Sask., 1885	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Associated concepts		Fish Creek, Battle of, Sask., 1885	Bataille de Fish Creek, Sask., 1885	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Associated concepts		Frenchman's Butte, Battle of, Sask., 1885	Bataille de la Butte-aux-Français, Sask., 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Associated concepts	Frog Lake Massacre, Frog Lake, Alta., 18		Massacre de Frog Lake, Frog Lake, Alb.,	<input type="checkbox"/>	Further evalu	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Associated concepts		Red River Expedition, 1870	Expédition de la rivière Rouge, 1870	<input type="checkbox"/>	Further evalu	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Associated concepts	Red River Rebellion, 1869-1870		Rébellion de la rivière Rouge, 1869-1870	<input type="checkbox"/>	Substitute	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Associated concepts	Riel Rebellion, 1885		Rébellion de Riel, 1885	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Substitute	<input type="checkbox"/>
13					<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Groups pattern	Abenaki art		Art abénaquis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Groups pattern	Abenaki baskets		Paniers abénaquis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Groups pattern	Abenaki baskets		Vannerie abénaquise	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Groups	Abenaki Indians		Abénaquis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Substitute	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Languages	Abenaki language		Abénaqui (Langue)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Groups pattern	Abenaki mythology		Mythologie abénaquise	<input type="checkbox"/>	Further evalu	<input type="checkbox"/>

Continuing work

- Identify inappropriate subject headings and determine their replacements:
 - Develop the authority record for the local subject heading by completing a form
 - Record the preferred term, variant terms, broader and related terms, and equivalent terms
 - Provide citations for sources consulted
 - A full-time summer student is working on this step
 - Create authority records by converting spreadsheet data into cataloguing data
 - One cataloguer will work on this; this work is mostly automated

Indigenous poetics in Canada / editor, Neal McLeod.
Waterloo, Ontario : Wilfrid Laurier University Press, [2014]
©2014
xii, 402 pages : map ; 23 cm.
text txt
unmediated n
volume nc
Indigenous studies series.
Indian poetry--Canada--History and criticism.
Canadian poetry--Indian authors--History and criticism.

First Nations poetry--History and criticism.
Canadian poetry--Indigenous authors--History and criticism.

Klerks, Cat.
The incredible adventures of Louis Riel : Canada's most famous rebel / by Cat Klerks.
Canmore, Alta. : Altitude Pub. Canada, 2007.
96 p. : ill., map ; 22 cm.
text txt
unmediated n
volume nc
Amazing stories junior edition (Canmore, Alta.)
Riel, Louis, 1844-1885.--Juvenile literature.
Red River Rebellion, 1869-1870--Biography--Juvenile literature.
Riel Rebellion, 1885--Biography--Juvenile literature.
Métis--Prairie Provinces--Biography--Juvenile literature.

Riel, Louis, 1844-1885.--Juvenile literature.
Red River Resistance, 1869-1870--Biography--Juvenile literature.
Riel Resistance, 1885--Biography--Juvenile literature. cish
Métis--Prairie Provinces--Biography--Juvenile literature.

Harper, Joan.

He moved a mountain : the life of Frank Calder and the Nisga'a land claims accord / Joan Harper.

Vancouver : Ronsdale Press, c2013.

viii, 201 p. : ill., map ; 23 cm.

text txt

unmediated n

volume nc

Calder, Frank, 1915-2006.

Politicians--British Columbia--Biography.

Businessmen--British Columbia--Biography.

Niska Indians--British Columbia--Biography.

Niska Indians--British Columbia--Claims.

Indians--Kings and rulers--Biography.

Calder, Frank, 1915-2006.

Politicians--British Columbia--Biography.

Businessmen--British Columbia--Biography.

Nisga'a people--British Columbia--Biography.

Nisga'a people--British Columbia--Claims.

First Nations chiefs--Biography.

Danziger, Edmund Jefferson, 1938-

Great Lakes Indian accommodation and resistance during the early reservation years, 1850-1900 / Edmund Jefferson Danziger, Jr.

Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, c2009.

xiii, 322 p. : ill., map ; 24 cm.

text txt

unmediated n

volume nc

Indians of North America--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

Reservation Indians--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

Indian reservations--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

First Nations--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

Native Americans--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

On-reserve First Nations--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

On-reservation Native Americans--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

First Nations reserves--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

Native American reservations--Great Lakes Region (North America)--History--19th century.

Future work

- Monitor monthly lists of Library of Congress subject headings for relevant subject headings that have been created or revised
 - For example, Borari Indians, Canadian aboriginal syllabics, Noble savage stereotype, Settler colonialism (with scope note “Here are entered works on colonialism in which the indigenous people of a region are displaced by settlers, who consider themselves the rightful inhabitants of the region”), Stockbridge Indians, and W̱SÁNEĆ Indians
- Identify group names that should be changed within Library of Congress subject headings, using their current subject heading structure
 - For example, Kainah Indians and Micmac Indians
- Identify concepts that are not currently represented by subject headings and propose those subject headings to Library of Congress
 - For example, Ribbon skirts and Traditional knowledge

Decisions

- We accepted the Library of Congress subject heading `Indigenous peoples`
 - Scope note: “Here are entered works on the aboriginal inhabitants either of colonial areas or of modern states where the aboriginal peoples are not in control of the government.”
- We are not working on any classification issues, although classification is problematic
- We are evaluating only subject headings relating to the Americas
- We will shadow and index the existing subject headings, so users can search with them but do not see them

- We accepted the names and spellings of groups that Library of Congress currently uses
 - For groups in Canada, we will change names or spellings selectively
 - We may evaluate the names and spellings of groups in a later stage of work
- For groups, we substituted “people” for “Indians” and “Eskimos”
 - Caribou Eskimos **becomes** Caribou people, Cree Indians **becomes** Cree people and Incas **becomes** Inca people

- “First Nations” cannot replace “Indians” because it is used only in Canada
 - We split Indians of North America into First Nations (for Canada) and Native Americans (for the United States)
 - For example, Indians of North America--Canada--Social conditions becomes First Nations--Social conditions and Indians of North America--United States--Social conditions becomes Native Americans--Social conditions
 - For example, Indian artists--Canada becomes First Nations artists, Indian artists--Alberta becomes First Nations artists--Alberta and Indian artists--United States becomes Native American artists

Challenges

- The scale of this work and the scope of changes required is immense and the timeline is very quick
- Many subject headings are ambiguous, so changes cannot be applied globally
 - For example, Eskimo dogs (which is a breed of dog) and Indian agents (which is an occupation)
 - Indian clubs (which is athletic equipment) is not relevant to us!

- Some group subject headings may confuse users if they are changed to our new pattern
 - For example, Delaware Indians and Manhattan Indians
- Some subject headings or subdivisions may appear offensive even though they adhere to patterns used for other groups
 - For example, Achuar mythology
- Some subject headings or subdivisions need to be evaluated because they are established only for Indigenous topics
 - For example, Aztecs--First contact with Europeans

- Subject headings reflect resources created and acquired, so demonstrate biases within society
 - For example, Cigar-store Indians (with scope note “Here are entered works on life-sized wooden carvings of Indians used as advertising for tobacco stores”), Indian hobbyists, Indians as mascots
- Many names and spellings of groups that Library of Congress currently uses are known to be incorrect
 - For example, Maricopa Indians (with citation “based on collaborative projects with the Pee Posh, people of Pee Posh heritage prefer Pee Posh and not Maricopa”) and Navajo Indians (with citation “the Navajo people call themselves Diné”)

- Some similar concepts use different terms in Canada and the United States
 - For example, Indian reservations
- Some associated concept subject headings will require significant work to determine whether the subject heading should be accepted or changed
 - For example, Bannock, Big House Ceremony (Delaware rite) , Ghost dance, and Hogans

- Some decisions need to be made without community consultation
 - It is not possible to consult with every group of people or about every concept
 - Subject headings are constantly being added or revised and need to be managed
 - Results of consultations need to be incorporated into a controlled vocabulary that requires consistency
 - We are prioritizing consultation and research based on geographic proximity
 - We need to collaborate with other institutions that are doing similar work in other places to share the results of consultation
 - We must acknowledge that our work will continue and will be iterative but that it is imperative to start working on this and do what we can

Next Steps

- We are confident that we will be able to publicize our work before National Indigenous Peoples Day 2022 (21 June 2022) and that we will complete this work before the end of the current NEOS strategic agenda (2022)
 - Before September 2021, we hope to have most of the terms for the local subject headings determined and authority records created, and technical work completed
 - Before January 2022, we hope to have completed the editorial work and have tested the technical work to ensure data remains current
 - Before July 2022, we hope to have the retrospective work completed

Questions?

Gisele Ramgoolam, Gisele.Ramgoolam@norquest.ca

Brian Stearns, brian.stearns@ualberta.ca