Modifications to the Library of Congress Subject Headings for use by Manitoba archives

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Abstract:

The Association for Manitoba Archives has created a database where their members can deposit archival descriptions, in order to provide a central search mechanism for users. The Library of Congress Subject Headings were also added, to provide the members with a controlled subject vocabulary to use in their descriptions. The AMA was quickly notified that the LCSH terminology relating to Indigenous peoples is antiquated and inappropriate in a Canadian and Manitoban context. Changes were made related to the following: the word "Indian"; geographic place being embedded in terms such as "Indians of North America"; changes related to Manitoba peoples specifically; and many miscellaneous changes not part of a larger pattern. New terms for concepts not extant in LCSH were also added. The final document contains 1093 changed or deleted headings and 120 new headings.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Library of Congress Subject Headings.

Introduction

The Association for Manitoba Archives (AMA) has created a database, called the Manitoba Archival Information Network (MAIN), where its members can deposit their archival descriptions, thus providing a central search mechanism for users throughout the province of Manitoba. The Association also loaded the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) into MAIN, so that members would have a controlled subject vocabulary to use in their descriptions. The Association was quickly notified that the LCSH terms used to describe Indigenous peoples are outdated and inappropriate in a Canadian context, a fact that has had implications in Canadian libraries for years. The AMA MAIN-LCSH Working Group was soon created to see what might be done. The Group members are:

- Brett Lougheed, Chair — University Archivist/Digital Curator, University of Winnipeg Archives and Records Centre
- Christine Bone — Cataloguing and Metadata Librarian, University of Manitoba Libraries

- Camille Callison — Indigenous Services Librarian, University of Manitoba Libraries
- Janet La France — Généalogiste, Centre du patrimoine, Société historique de Saint-Boniface
- Terry Reilly — Archivist at large

Process

As recommended by Martin that "subject headings have to fit into a thesaurus and should be consistent with the practice used in other headings in that thesaurus"[1], the Group decided that any changes would have to fit seamlessly back into LCSH as a whole, and that they would have to adhere to LCSH structure, including the rules of subject string construction. As MAIN does not contain references between terms, we did not attempt to change the See- and See Also- References in LCSH. We made changes to the authorized headings only. However, all of our changes were made keeping in mind the relationships between these headings and others, as well as where the terms reside in LCSH's hierarchical structure. Therefore, all of the changes are internally consistent and, with some additional analysis, could be converted into a proper thesaurus, explicitly showing these relationships.

The first step in our process was to find as many LCSH headings as possible that could be candidates for change. These were categorized into broad pattern decisions, affecting many headings, as well as a list of dozens of miscellaneous terms that would have to be addressed individually. As well as changing headings, our aim was also to add any relevant terms not extant in LCSH.
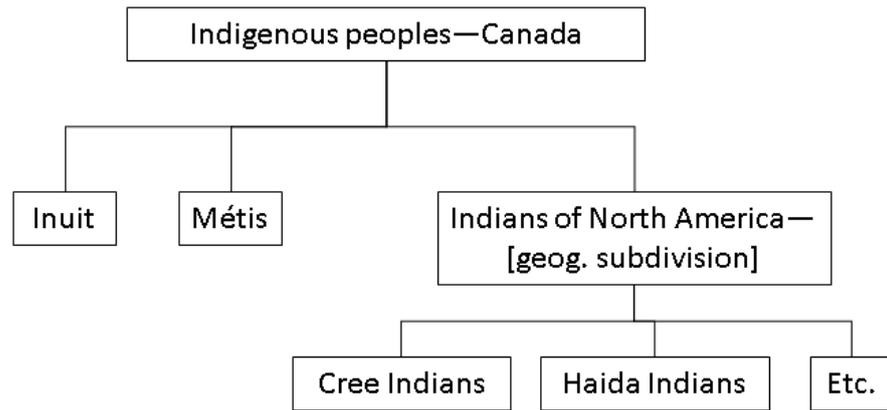
The Group spent months analyzing, discussing, debating, and consulting with Indigenous experts, both local and from around the world, and eventually came up with a list of recommended changes. These recommendations were then sent to Indigenous leaders and communities around the province for their opinions, along with specific questions, such as what names they use for their own people.

Once all the responses were received and analyzed, the Group made final decisions for implementation. The author then created a spreadsheet reflecting the Group's decisions, indicating, for every affected subject heading, what the new term would be. The final document contains 1093 changed or deleted headings and 120 new headings[2]. It may be viewed or downloaded at http://dx.doi.org/10.5203/ss_ama.main_bon.chr.2015.1.
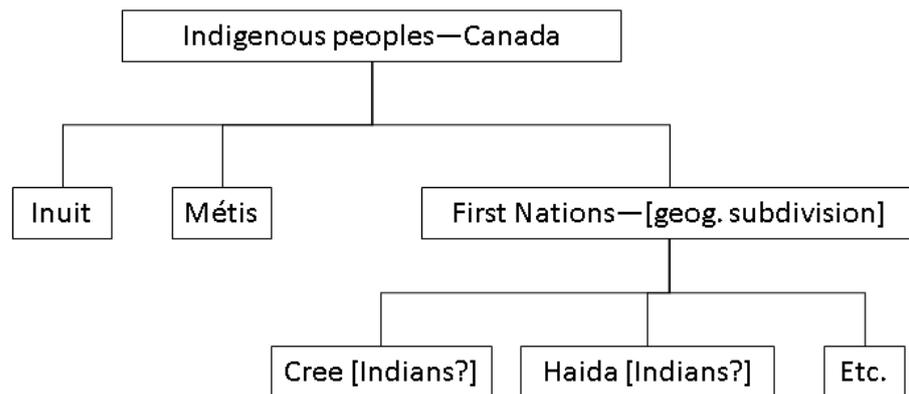
Changing the word "Indian"

The first, and most sweeping, problem the Group addressed was what to do about the word "Indian." This term is generally outdated in Canada, and, anecdotally, is the problem in LCSH most often mentioned by reference librarians and library users at the University of Manitoba; particularly Native Studies students and professors. The current LCSH structure for Indigenous peoples of Canada can be seen in Figure 1.[3]

Figure 1:
Current Structure

```
                    Indigenous peoples—Canada
                               |
          ┌────────────┬───────┴──────────────────────┐
        Inuit        Métis              Indians of North America—
                                           [geog. subdivision]
                                                  |
                                    ┌─────────────┼──────────────┐
                              Cree Indians   Haida Indians      Etc.
```

Much of the debate, on how to reform LCSH "Indian" headings, has been focused on the terminology itself. For example, changing "Indians of North America" to "First Nations" would be a huge improvement and would bring our subject headings in line with more current and accurate terminology. See Figure 2 for what that would look like.

Figure 2:
With change in terminology

```
                    Indigenous peoples—Canada
                               |
          ┌────────────┬───────┴──────────────────────┐
        Inuit        Métis           First Nations—[geog. subdivision]
                                                  |
                                    ┌─────────────┼──────────────┐
                          Cree [Indians?]  Haida [Indians?]     Etc.
```

However, there is also a barrier to access resulting from the three-tiered structure in the hierarchy, which cannot be resolved by merely changing the terminology. The term at the topmost level ("Indigenous peoples") and those that are, or could be, used at the intermediate level ("Indians of North America" or "First Nations") are all used interchangeably by authors, information seekers, and Indigenous people themselves. While these words all have distinct definitions, the definitions are not strictly adhered to in popular language. This creates difficulties in assigning the current headings to records in a consistent way. For example, a book called "The Indigenous peoples of British Columbia" and another called "The First Nations of British Columbia" are likely about the same thing, because there are few Inuit or Métis indigenous to British Columbia. Both authors are using perfectly accurate, but different, terms. Cataloguers must choose between using the language of the author (risking different headings getting assigned to resources about the same thing); or ignoring the author's language, examining the work to determine whether Inuit or Métis people are discussed therein, and applying the narrowest appropriate term, as directed by the LCSH rule of Specificity.[4] In a perfect world, the second option would be applied every time. But, understandably, it is not. At the University of Manitoba, and perhaps elsewhere in Canada, this causes great confusion for patrons, and forces them to use multiple search terms in an

unfocussed way*. Merely changing the words, without addressing the structure, would not fix this problem.

For our project, we adopted a flatter structure, which can be seen in Figure 3. There is one broad term, "Indigenous peoples," leaving no room for cataloguers or archivists to use anything else, and leaving one broad search term for information seekers to use. The term "Indigenous peoples" was proposed because it is already in use in LCSH, and therefore fits seamlessly into the rest of the vocabulary. It is also current and widely-accepted language in Manitoba, as confirmed by our survey results. The terms for Inuit, Métis, and for the individual First Nations groups would obviously remain, but would all exist on the same level in the hierarchy, eliminating entirely the intermediate heading "Indians of North America", and not replacing it with "First Nations" or anything else.

Figure 3:
Proposed Revision
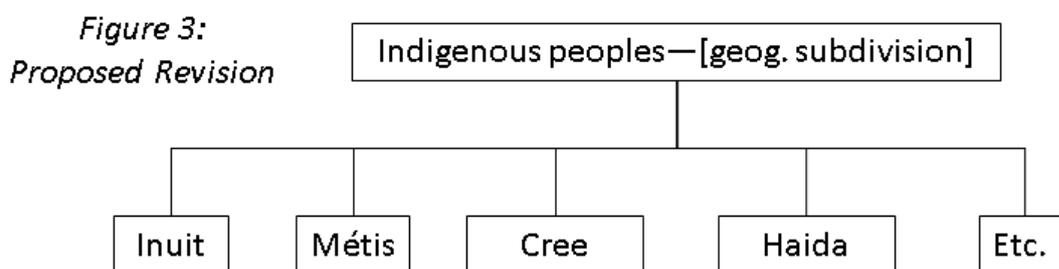
As mentioned earlier, the final document of changes only contains authorized headings; not the relationships between headings. Thus the adopted two-tiered structure would not be reflected there explicitly. Nonetheless, if the headings were to be changed in a consistent and meaningful way, the underlying hierarchical structure would have to be clear to us. In our final list of changes, then, all of the headings with the word "Indian(s)" would be changed to "Indigenous", "Indigenous peoples", etc. ("Indians" headings related to individual groups, e.g. "Cree Indians," were not included in this pattern change, but are discussed later in the paper.) In order to maintain consistency, this pattern change would be made for all the peoples of the Americas, not just when describing people in Canada. For example:

> Indian architecture → Indigenous architecture
> Indians of Mexico → Indigenous peoples—Mexico
> Federal aid to Indians → Federal aid to Indigenous peoples
> Autobiographies—Indian authors → Autobiographies—Indigenous authors

Our decision to flatten the three-tiered structure into two tiers is not without potential controversy. The Canadian government categorizes Canadian Indigenous people into a three-tiered structure as well. Aside from differences in terminology, this officially-sanctioned structure is identical to the current LCSH structure, with "Indians" or "First Nations" existing as a broad category distinct from Inuit and Métis[6]. It was also acknowledged by the Group that some First Nations people themselves value this distinction, despite how the terms are used in casual conversation. So we found ourselves in a position of having to choose between official (and potentially socially and politically meaningful) categories and efficient access to

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* The Canadian Subject Headings thesaurus (CSH)[5] uses still different terms for these concepts, and is used by many Canadian libraries alongside LCSH, adding even more search terms and confusion for patrons. As the MAIN database does not use CSH, this paper does not address the details of its impact.

resources. We chose efficient access to resources, but this decision was not made lightly, and it may not be the right decision for everyone. Thankfully, none of the respondents from the surveyed communities were opposed to our decision.

<u>Converting "…of North America" etc. into a Geographic Subdivision</u>

In terms such as "Indians of North America", "Indians of South America" etc., the word "Indians" is not the only problem. When these headings were created, geographic location was embedded right into the main heading, rather than relying on geographic subdivisions to indicate location, as is normally the case in LCSH. What this has done is grouped the peoples of the Americas into categories based entirely on European-defined geographic borders. Thus these categories seem arbitrary and meaningless. For example, the peoples of southern Texas are "Indians of North America," the implication being that they have more in common with the "Indians of North America" in Manitoba than they do with their close neighbours considered "Indians of Mexico."

Initially, there was some discussion in our Group of changing "Indians of North America" etc. to "Indigenous peoples of North America" etc., for purely pragmatic reasons. But for the reasons outlined above, we quickly decided that the extra work of converting these embedded geographical categories into geographic subdivisions was worth it. It could be argued that, even in geographical subdivisions, it may not be appropriate to use LC geographic headings in an Indigenous context, because they reflect boundaries drawn by Europeans. This question was more than our Group was willing to take on, however, and we were glad to at least pull them out of the main part of the heading describing the peoples themselves.

There are a couple of variables it would be helpful to consider if implementing this change on a large scale; and if it were also desirable to maintain LCSH subject string construction. For example, if one were changing the access points in a library catalogue, and were hoping to use automated processes to complete the task, one may want to keep in mind the following:

1. The change will be different depending on whether a geographical subdivision already exists in the string. E.g.

> Indians of North America → Indigenous peoples—North America
> ("North America" is converted into a geographical subdivision)
>
> Indians of North America—Manitoba → Indigenous peoples—Manitoba
> ("North America" is removed)

2. The change will be different depending on whether existing topical subdivisions can be subdivided geographically. E.g.

> Indians of North America—Languages →
> Indigenous peoples—North America—Languages
> ("—Languages" cannot be subdivided geographically)
>
> Indians of North America—Kinship →
> Indigenous peoples—Kinship—North America
> ("—Kinship" can be subdivided geographically)

Changes made for Manitoba peoples only

As well as making broad changes to terms describing peoples of the Americas as a whole, some changes were made only to terms affecting Manitoba peoples specifically. Applying these changes to all the individual peoples in the Americas, or even just to those in North America, would have been far too labour intensive. Additionally, we did not want to make changes to headings related to specific groups who we were not consulting directly. The following changes were made for Manitoba peoples only:

1. The word "Indians" was removed from the group name, e.g.:

Cree Indians → Cree
Dakota Indians → Dakota

2. Group names not extant in LCSH were added, e.g.:

Oji-Cree
Swampy Cree

3. Group names were changed to the name used by the people in Manitoba themselves. These changes relied heavily on the survey results, and were applied to every heading containing the term, e.g.:

Athapascan Indians → Dene
Athapascan women → Dene women

4. Headings with the word "mythology," e.g. "Cree mythology," were deleted outright, and not replaced with anything else. With the terms "Religion" and "Folklore" being available, and with the difference between religion and myth being fuzzy at best, and Eurocentric and inaccurate at worst, we eliminated its use for Manitoba peoples entirely. The broad term "Indian mythology" was changed to "Spirituality—Indigenous" to be used on its own, or in combination with terms for individual groups.

Miscellaneous changes, Additions, and Guidelines

As well as the pattern changes discussed so far, we made a considerable number of changes to individual headings falling into no pattern. Each of these had to be discussed individually by the Group. Some decisions were obvious and quick, while others required lengthier discussion or help from others. Usually, the change was meant to convert an LCSH term to the term most commonly used by Indigenous people in Canada generally or Manitoba specifically. A few terms affecting the people of Nunavut were also changed, as many Manitoba archives contain resources related to the North. The spreadsheet itself is obviously the best source to view an exhaustive list of these changes, but here is a sample:

Off-reservation boarding schools → Residential schools
Eskimo dogs → Qimmiq
Sweatbaths → Sweat lodges
Tribal government → Band government

We not only made changes to existing LCSH headings, but also added 120 terms for concepts not reflected in LCSH at all. Many other subject-specific heading lists and thesauri were consulted. The list created by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs Resource Centre[7] was especially helpful for us, and saved us a lot of time. Our own list of possible additions was created from these, as well as from new terms we came up with on our own. Then, for each possible candidate, LCSH was searched to make sure some term for that concept didn't already exist. Then we determined if the concept exists as part of the culture of peoples in Manitoba or Nunavut. If not, it was discarded from consideration. If it was to be included, then the appropriate local term for the concept was determined, and added. Some examples of added terms are:

> Smudging
> Métis scrip
> Fishing rights
> Sentencing circles
> Voyageurs

"Voyageurs" is an example of a term extant as a See Reference in LCSH, in this case pointing to the term "Fur traders." This is one of a few cases where the authorized LCSH term was not found to be problematic in itself, but where we did not believe that the two terms are actually synonyms. In this case, we considered the term "Voyageurs" to be a narrower term from "Fur traders." So "Fur traders" was not changed, but "Voyageurs" was added.

Along with changes and additions to LCSH, we also composed a short list of guidelines to help archivists make decisions about how to use terms we thought might be confusing. For example, Métis identity is controversial in Manitoba. Some Métis leaders posit that anyone with both Indigenous and European ancestry is Métis; while others would argue that only those belonging to the distinct Métis cultural group should be included. Our guidelines recommend that archivists stay out of the controversy by letting the resource speak for itself. If the resource mentions Métis or Michif, then use "Métis," otherwise use "Indigenous peoples—Mixed descent."

Next Steps

Now that the spreadsheet is complete, as of Spring 2016 we are seeking input from the AMA members. Those responses will be reviewed and the spreadsheet tweaked if necessary. If there are no suggestions for very large changes, the task will then begin of implementing the changes in the MAIN database itself. There will be many technical implications involved in completing this accurately, but we are hopeful that it will be finished by the end of the year.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Giles Martin, "Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (paper presented at the First Roundtable on Library and Archives Collections and Services of Relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, State Library of of South Australia, Adelaide, 4 May 1995).
http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/33841/20030303-0000/www.nla.gov.au/niac/libs/martin.html.

2. Christine Bone, Brett Lougheed, Camille Callison, Janet La France, and Terry Reilly, "Changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings Related to Indigenous Peoples: for use in the AMA MAIN Database", 2015. http://dx.doi.org/10.5203/ss_ama.main_bon.chr.2015.1.

3. Christine Bone, "The Structure of Indigenous Subject headings in LCSH" (presentation at the Canadian Library Association Conference, Winnipeg, Canada, May, 2013.)

4. Library of Congress. "Assigning and Constructing Subject Headings," in Subject Headings Manual, module H180, page 2, February 2016.
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7. Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs Resource Centre, "UBCIC Topical Authority List", 2014.