Knowing Nearby Others: Approaches to Precise Terminology in New Slavic Vocabularies

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Abstract:

Library of Congress Subject Headings for Slavic works on the folklore and social customs of former Soviet states are undergoing a new consciousness-raising. In spite of the notorious slowness of that institution's working through anachronistic subject headings, there have been efforts by the Slavic cataloging community to increase the specificity, and thus the understanding of non-Russian Slavic cultures and their folk ways. This paper aims to show what progress has been made in the past quarter century in subject heading creation and application, and discusses some of the practical and ethical issues that arise in creating and changing Slavic folklore subject headings.

Keywords: non-Russian Slavic folklore, new subject headings, accessibility, multiculturalism, LCSH

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at some of the issues revolving around the interface between the user and the catalog, central issues to the entire discipline of librarianship. Specifically, the paper investigates the subject analysis of Slavic works that have been published since the break-up of the Soviet Union, in the fields of folklore and social customs in former Soviet states and ethnic republics. My query is directly related to a more diverse awareness of these former Soviet states' particular ethnic cultural traditions, and is an investigation into how distinctive, less biased subject headings may or may not be being realized. We need to hone our ability to see and understand what is there. Problematic or overly broad treatment of bibliographic creation by catalogers act as limiting factors for catalog functionality, affecting information retrieval and usability, so this paper aims to show what progress has been made in the past

quarter century in subject heading value, and discusses some of the practical and ethical issues that arise in creating and changing Slavic folklore subject headings.

A search of the literature revealed no studies on ethnographic Slavic subject headings and few lists of such terms in various cultures of Slavic lands. The majority of articles on terminology and folklore, as one would expect, are literary criticism and interpretation of particular authors and works. There was also no research that I found in the journal, *Slavic & East European Information Resources* (SEEIR), on this most interesting topic. But there were some avenues to be found in JSTOR's database, that included good bibliographies that led to pertinent or substantive or fascinating directions that I plan to follow up on.

The Slavic Cataloging Manual mostly only treats the geographic aspects of Slavic subject headings, so it also is not the kind of forum for this kind of subject heading topic, although it does include a paragraph on The Slavic Subject Authority Funnel Project. This is a part of the Library of Congress Cooperative Cataloging Program known as SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program. The structure and functions of SACO will be explained briefly in a following section and I will mention just a little more about how to contribute our subject headings.

This paper seeks to address the following topics: (1) Questions of value: scholarly imperatives and the maintenance of standards; subject headings in Slavic folklore as a way of adding value for analytical purposes; authorized subject headings as a way of avoiding idiosyncratic analysis; (2) Issues of authority work: catalogers as mediators; facilitating customized approaches for the discipline of folklore; practical and theoretical issues; (3) How to inspire more libraries and catalogers to do this work.

The good news that I've discovered is that - even though all artificial structures are intrinsically loaded with ideological and political perspectives and the act of choosing cannot be unbiased --

all three of the above topics can come to happier conclusions because of the nature of the passion that most cataloging librarians have for their avocation.

My research has ended up so far showing the continued need for an evolution in the usability of the catalog, for precise, distinctive Slavic folklore subject headings, and even the necessity for broad themes to be extracted from the works of and about ethnic minorities of the Russian Federation.

Part I.

Despite the ideal of inclusiveness that was pronounced for the early Soviet Union, the reality of the dominant culture had more to do with obscuring minority cultures than studying them. From the 1990's the separation into independent Slavic countries has allowed for great opportunities for the emergence of cultural representation. Individual cultures' history can now show its regional identities, versus the Russian identity, and catalogers can now construct and represent precise local concepts, no longer substituting general terms for individual ethnic ways. I will also include comparison subject analysis of legacy materials in Folklore (mostly print) cataloged prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

But, as Marjorie Mandelstam Blazer wrote in her article "Ethnicity Without Power: The Siberian Khanty in Soviet Society," "Western discussion of Soviet nationality issues frequently centers on large national groups and their varying potential for dissent. The fate of smaller groups, particularly those within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, is less often explored and is sometimes obscure by assumptions of forced acculturation. Rather than viewing the dominant Soviet Russian culture as a shark eating small fish cultures… it is more appropriate to decipher a range of acculturation options and experiences. Sharks can get indigestion, and all the economic changes introduced in small … societies do not eliminate questions of ethnicity. Sometimes they exacerbate them." (Slavic Review 1983)

In any case, I decided that enough years have now passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union to be able to attempt to begin finding answers to some of the following: What is behind the Slavic Folklore subject headings that appear in our catalogs? How are new subjects different from those of the Soviet years when the individual states, peoples, and cultural identities were subsumed into the Russian identity? How do Slavic catalogers make their choices for the terms they need to convey the essence of a Folklore work, for different cultures? Are 21st century subject headings notably more nationalistic in some cases? What is the coverage (when even widely known terms like "Rusalka" for Russian SH's is not included) and quality – and how do we measure the quality of the cataloging and the catalog for these subject areas? What standards and best practices should Slavic catalogers and metadata librarians apply to 21st century Folklore and Social customs of the fifteen new countries? (for example, Library of Congress Subject Headings [LCSH]) How can the information be retrievable on a global discovery scale?

Although my study has allowed me to find some answers, the above questions will be ongoing issues of authority and scholarship for Slavic cataloging librarians, that will benefit from continuing research, and perhaps from the application of data sets that can analyze patterns, trends, and associations. Fortunately they are not local problems, and need not be solved locally, which is one of the advantages of our community of cataloging and metadata librarians and, for example, the Slavic Cataloging Manual. But on the other hand, as can be seen in results emanating from the widespread use of the dominant thesauri for controlled vocabularies (LCSH in the United Sates and increasingly worldwide), problems of over-generalization of terms or lack of understanding, that a person in the field can recognize and name correctly, become entrenched and then multiply, obscuring the usefulness of a work for a researcher, and slanting the understanding of the more diverse or culture-specific nature of the subject.

Through the centuries non-Russian Slavic people have retained the unique qualities of their languages and art forms, and have not sacrificed their distinctive national characteristics. But as many distinguished cataloging librarians have described in the past (people like Hope A. Olson and Sanford Berman for instance), subject headings can easily, and, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate "the exclusionary cultural supremacy of the mainstream culture," (Olson); Steven Knowlton wrote about subject headings "exhibit[ing] bias..." As E.A. Buchanan writes, "Catalogers have a great responsibility to 'preserve cultural values and specificity.' I would add that, fortunately, Slavic catalogers are more than capable of bringing the unique qualities of national folklores to light.

Part II.

Currently and into the future, Slavic cataloging librarians should always be ready and able to recommend (for example to LC, or to the Российская национальная библиотека or the Національна бібліотека України ім. В.І. Вернадського etc.) completely new, precise and useful subject headings in the field for the works they describe -- ready to make these works open and accessible to as many users as possible.

Because correct subject headings can provide scholars with opportunities for meaningful analysis that were not available in earlier catalogs, catalogers play a pivotal role in the advancement of research when they create and choose to use relevant, appropriate terminologies for describing works. Paired with that infrastructure building for scholarly analysis is the wider enabling of simple discovery for both Slavic area students and scholars in other fields.

In the 21st century the catalog and its unique cultural contents can more speedily and accurately take into account the multicultural Slavic context. Cataloging and subject analysis are expensive processes because they are so labor intensive. Our cataloging departments want usability. But our scholars want accuracy. So we catalogers must present remedies on how to jive these three imperatives.

Problems (and solutions) of future analysis are related to the impact of new technologies on subject analysis, including 1) the imminent arrival of a Linked Data (= interlinked, structured data for semantic queries by machine, rather than human-readable) environment. 2) Also, FAST (= Faceted Application of Subject Terminology) – headings that are derived from LCSH -- may facilitate the spread of non-Russian Slavic cultural subject headings. As part of its appeal to some cataloging departments, FAST makes the subdivision system less important, and it has a lower bar for entry, and is more understandable than LCSHs for many users.

The need for conveying true information to scholars and library users throughout the world, may also bring up the perennial question of crowdsourcing, which some say subject analysis cries out for. Is this true in the case of particular subjects in Folklore and Social customs? Not a definitive answer to the question, but something to think about in relation to it : Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden said in a New York Times piece from Jan. 22, 2017, "As information professionals, we're always looking at what's the most authoritative source for the information…"

We need to keep asking ourselves how we can get to the value that's been promised in our new technologies.

Part III.

Harking back to my title and one of the main themes of this paper, I want to draw on the following excerpt on "Otherness" from Wikipedia, which contains a nice overall explanation of how non-representative subject headings are formed : "Regarding the production of knowledge about the Other, Michel Foucault and the Frankfurt School identified the process of Othering as everything to do with the creation and maintenance of imaginary representations in service to geopolitical power and domination. Representations of the Other

are manifestations of cultural attitudes inherent to historiographies of the non–European [in my case, non-Russian] peoples labelled as "the Other". The dominant ideology of the colonialist culture, in my case, the Soviet culture, explains the non-Russian world to the Russian world.

One could argue that Soviet cultural studies were often only focused on the high culture—the languages and literatures, the arts and philologies—of Russia as a cultural region, rather than as a geopolitical place inhabited by different peoples and societies. About such cultural misrepresentation, to paraphrase cultural critic Edward Saïd, he said that there is "a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces" that brought the non-Russian into Russian learning, Russian consciousness, and the Russian and Soviet empire. Its objective discoveries—the work of innumerable devoted scholars who edited texts and translated them, codified grammars, wrote dictionaries, reconstructed dead epochs, produced positivistically verifiable learning—are and always have been conditioned by the fact that its truths, like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language, and, what is the truth of language?, Nietzsche once said.

In practices of historical negationism, the writing of distorted history about the places and peoples continue in the postmodern era, especially in contemporary journalism; e.g. in the Third World, political parties practice intra-national Othering with fabricated "facts", such as threat-reports about non-existent threats (political, social, military) that are meant to aggravate the character faults of the opponent political parties, which usually are composed of people from the social and ethnic groups identified and designated as the Other in that society.

The process of Othering a person or a social group, by means of an ideal ethnocentricity (belief that one's ethnic group is the superior group), and the cultural tendency to evaluate and assign meaning to Other ethnicities, which are negatively measured against the ideal standard of the Self—is realised through mundane methods of naming and the publication of consciously or unconsciously charged or merely ignorant terminology.

Post-colonial scholarship demonstrated that, in pursuit of empire, "the colonizing powers narrated an 'Other' whom they set out to save, dominate, control, [and] civilize ... [in order to] extract resources through colonization" of the homeland of the people labelled as the Other.

Counter to the post-colonial perspective of the Other as part of a Dominator–Dominated binary relationship, post-modern philosophy presents the Other and Otherness as phenomenological and ontological progress for Man and society. Public knowledge of the social identity of peoples classified as "Outsiders" is *de facto* acknowledgement of their being real, and so they are part of the body politic, especially in the cities. As such, "the post-modern city is a geographical celebration of difference that moves sites once conceived of as 'marginal' to the [social] centre of discussion and analysis" of the human relations between the Outsiders and the Establishment."

There is a moral issue to be dealt with in making use of one subject heading or another, sometimes more explicitly than others. All catalogers know this. As Sheila Bair of Western Michigan University stated in her article, "Toward a Code of Ethics for Cataloging," "Cataloging is the foundation of librarianship, and catalogers are professionals with special skills that set them apart from the profession in general and give them unique ethical responsibilities. They have the power to help or harm on an increasingly global scale…" and "The primary role and duty of the librarian is to connect relevant, appropriate information to the people who need it. The ALA Task Force on Core Competencies (2002) states, 'the ability to organize collections of informational materials in order that desired items can be

retrieved quickly and easily is a librarian's unique competency…' James Moor's just-consequentialist theory and J.J. Britz's ideas on ethical issues relating to intellectual freedom [are] an approach to making ethical cataloging decisions…" Thus it is also with these ethical issues in the background that this paper attempts to address multicultural issues of Slavic subject headings. Bair writes, "Catalogers are responsible for two powerful areas – access and naming. They analyze content for 'aboutness,' including explicit and implicit subject content, and translate this into a surrogate – a representation of the information – in the form of a database record. … As gatekeepers of information, catalogers have special moral obligations to their local clientele, but, increasingly to a global clientele as well."

She also quotes D. Bade saying that "Unfortunately there must be blame for loss of access and misinformation placed on catalogers who labor under a lack of linguistic and subject knowledge. They are forced by institutional efficiencies to 'work in many languages, many formats, and in every subject anyone ever thought of.'"

Bair's work on ethical cataloging is a clarifying explanation of how correct, precise, and representative subject headings should be formed, and in her conclusion she includes a simple 10-point "Cataloging Code of Ethics." Her third rule, one that calls out the creation of subject headings is, "We are vigilant in ensuring that we do not purposely or inadvertently "censor" or deny access to information by allowing cataloging backlogs or through inaccuracy, misuse, or nonuse of encoding, subject headings, classification schemes, and authority control."

Part IV.

Just some of the selected examples of authoritative names and troves of unique cultural subjects from Slavic folklore that I hope to describe further on in my research are from -- the Udmurt national folk epic, Дорвыжы, the Kalmyk epic poem *Җаңһр,* and the Tatar oral history, Chora Batir, among other forms such as the частушки, which (although Russian) is one of the few Slavic genre types like it in the LCSH that need to help open the catalog to terminology based on the actual cultures an authors' work is about.

In an ideal world of Slavic, non-Russian folklore headings, catalogers could use a glossary or a motif index like Stith Thompson's, and I would love to work on creating such a glossary as an outcome of the research I did for this IFLA paper. A specialized manual for the Slavic folklore field could be written using Robert Macfarlane's wonderful book, <u>Landmarks</u>, as a source and template. (The book is a work on the language of place, in which Macfarlane cataloged regional words for the British landscape.) It might be going down a rabbit hole, and would no doubt be a lifelong study, but it would be deeply useful and enriching. Another helpful reference source I'd love to create would be a listing of the LCSH Slavic folklore headings, along the lines of works published listing important changes in LCSHs for certain periods of years.

The countries in my research were: Baltic: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan; Eastern Europe: Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine;
Russia; and the Southern Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia. I also included Russia's twenty ethnic republics in my research: from Adygea to Mari El to Tatarstan.

Ideally my study of post-1991 Slavic non-Russian subject headings should have produced telltale signs of widening library recognition and markers of scholarship on folklore ethnography. A clear benefit of this could not YET be identified in this analysis. I attribute this in part to a lack of administrative support for and understanding of cataloging librarians and their work, as it is behind the scenes, infrastructural, and expensive. The position is absolutely understandable, and we only have to continue to keep the faith, and keep adding subject headings when we can. As mentioned earlier, and to repeat here, I'll make a plea for SACO work further below.

In the following section are examples of some Russian and non-Russian folklore subject headings that I chose to use as a kind of control group in comparing like subject headings. These all could and should be included in the LCSH :

English /	Russian /	the language / existing subject heading
A hero =	Покатигорошек	/ Котигорошко (ukr) [a bogatyr, fighting evil creatures] /
Fairy =	Фея	/ pəri (aze) /
Bees =	Пчелы	/ бджоли (ukr) /
A sacred woods =		/ Šventybrastis (lit) /
A god of Dawn =		/ Uzhara (chm)
Shaman =	Шаман	/ Tabib (bak), *бөө* (bua) /
Love charm =	Присушка	/ /
Conjurer =	Ведун/Ведьма	/ /
House spirit =	Домоводец	/ сусьетко (kom) /
Female house spirit =	Кикимора	/ possibly from Udmurt?: kikka-murt [Wikipedia] /
A Communal dance form =		/ adyghe jegu (ady) /
An Armenian holiday =		/ Vartanants /

Etc.

As can be seen from the blank areas, difficulties have arisen when catalogers have not been able to implement the best laid schemes to enrich the subject headings thesaurus.

My plan is to add to this very short list created for this IFLA talk, and compile a reference source for catalogers and others. Included would be a bibliography of the works from which the terms arise.

Part V.

H.A. Olson says catalogers are powerful; they "have the 'power to name,' that is, the power to choose a name for the 'aboutness' of a resource." Peter Morville has stated, 'there are few things as quietly powerful as labels.' The iconoclast Sanford Berman sent all catalogers the invitation and the challenge to be open, disinterested, ethical, and most of all: knowledgeable about one's bibliographic creations.

Therefore, to talk about essential working specifics, the section below describes the method for contributing a Subject Heading to the Library of Congress. This is a process that all Slavic catalogers should include in their workflow whenever possible.

From the SACO site: SACO proposals go through the editorial process in order to be incorporated into the controlled vocabulary of *Library of Congress Subject Headings*.

Following is a very brief description of the workflow:

SACO Processing takes about 9-10 weeks from start to finish.

A cataloger creates a SACO proposal using a web form.

New proposals are reviewed by a SACO specialist to assure that basic *Subject Headings Manual* guidelines are correctly applied (for example, correct coding for Geographic subdivision; correct MARC 21 tagging, correct coding of diacritics; adequate source citations are provided; and appropriate Broader Terms and/or Related Terms); next, they are put into the editorial workflow for inclusion on a tentative list of proposed subject headings, which are then posted to the Web (still as tentative). Next, LC employees, SACO participants, and other constituencies examine the tentative list and make comments or suggestions to the subject policy specialist in charge of the list.

The subject policy specialist examines all the proposals in great depth for conformance to policies as stated in *Subject Headings Manual*, and responds to comments. Next, an editorial meeting is held, where proposals are either approved, changed according to the subject heading policies, not approved, withdrawn, or marked resubmit. All proposals that were approved at the editorial meeting as submitted are added to the LCSH Master File, and after all the remaining proposals on the tentative list are corrected, the approved copy of the list is posted to the Web.

The Slavic Subject Authority Funnel Project, or Slavic Funnel, is where we can make a huge difference and exert our expertise, adding folklore headings.

From its website: The Slavic Funnel was formed in 2010 and falls under the Library of Congress Cooperative Cataloging Program known as SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program). The goal of the project is to promote and facilitate the creation of subject authority records for all subjects relating to the cataloging of Slavic materials.

Slavic catalogers who identify new topics that would benefit from a new, authorized subject heading, are heartily encouraged to submit a proposal via the Slavic Funnel SACO proposal form.

Receiving SACO training is an essential component of the program. This can be done formally in the classroom, or online via webinar, or even by downloading the materials to learn on one's own.

There are web Resources linked on the website for SACO Proposals, but just a few of these have links apropos to the folklore topic. There is an "Ethnography, Linguistics," resource but it does not contain much of use on folklore. But the "Area Studies Reference Sources" (most of which is from American, British, Canadian, or Australian sources), has "Country Studies" from the Library of Congress. These are digitized resources that were mostly published in the mid-'90s, that have chapters on such topics as History, Politics, Industry, Finance, and Post-Communism, but also have general paragraphs on Ethnic Composition and Population Characteristics that lead to some brief topics of ethnography. These are worth looking at as a part of one's SACO research work. There is one that has research on Poland, one that covers Yugoslavia, one on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, etc.

CONCLUSION

What can we do going forward? / What can we cataloging librarians work towards?

As Alan Danskin of The British Library wrote, The answer is: By demonstrating the value that catalogers add, we show our administrations that we make a difference where it counts—by enabling users to find what they want.

Paraphrased from a talk by Michael Buckland, Emeritus Prof, UCB School of Information:

- Make a broader, more accessible, more inclusive and more respectful body of knowledge.
- Bring new people and new ways of thinking into longstanding issues within our world of Slavic subject headings.
- Use and create systems and standards that lower barriers to use and movement of data across contexts.

Acknowledgments

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