Multicultural Issues and Awareness in Subject Representation and Access

Subject Analysis and Access (SAA) Section

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IFLA Subject Analysis and Access

Section mission statement:

“We focus on methods of providing subject access to documents of all kinds in libraries and information services of all types.”

https://www.ifla.org/about-the-subject-analysis-and-access-section
Subject access in context

• Knowledge organization is about describing, representing, filing and organizing documents and document representations as well as subjects and concepts both by humans and by computer programs (Hjørland 2008)

• Content indexing – methods

• Standardized vocabularies (knowledge organization systems, documentary languages)
  – represent knowledge
  – represent the content of information resources
  – facilitate subject access by users

• Focus on multicultural and multilingual aspects
Dealing with language...

- Something can be expressed in many different ways

https://lccn.loc.gov/sh85088352
Dealing with language...

- Something can be expressed in many different ways
- A word can have different meanings
Dealing with language...

- Something can be expressed in many different ways
- A word can have different meanings
- Language is culturally grounded

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https://icd.who.int/browse10/2016/en#F64.9
Controlled vocabularies: benefits and challenges in multicultural and multilingual environments
Controlled vocabularies:
Scenarios of mapping benefiting the user

- Enhancing the search scope – by providing multilingual subject access on the basis of mapping different indexing schemes (LCSH, RAMEAU, GND)

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- Enabling meta searches

- (Re)using external metadata
Controlled vocabularies: Cultural

• Individual vocabularies:
  – Biased, ethical treatment
  – Marginalization (Mai, 2016)
  – Terminology – Power to Name (Olson, 2002)
  – Neutrality – a cover for bias?

• Across vocabularies:
  – Domain differences
  – Terminological differences
  – Mappings

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Resource description for subject access

• Culturally-driven misinterpretation, misrepresentation bias
• Applying biased KOS tools

American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World
by David E. Stannard
“A book about the “genocide of Native Americans”
“the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world”

Library of Congress Subject Headings:
• Columbus, Christopher — Influence.
• Indians, Treatment of.
• Indians — First contact with Europeans.
• America — Discovery and exploration — Spanish.

Intercultural awareness of KO professionals

**Intercultural competence:** The ability to recognize the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, culture, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service.”

(Overall, 2009, p. 189)

- Studies of cultural/intercultural awareness and competency in public services
- The role of intercultural competence in the work of knowledge organization professionals (Salaba, 2018)
  - What education, experiences, training increase intercultural awareness
  - How do information professionals become interculturally competent?
- Competency standards (ACRL, 2012)

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User perspectives and interactions

• User interactions with vocabulary information
• User interactions with resource representations
• User terminology, perceptions, and interpretation
References

Question for discussion

How do we allow users the flexibility for multicultural and multilingual subject access to information, avoiding cultural and linguistic biases?
Opportunities

• Vocabulary creation (representing knowledge)
  – Multicultural
  – Multilingual

• Subject analysis and access (representing resource content)

• Integration of technologies and platforms such as Wikidata

• User experience – multicultural and multilingual solutions