Introduction

The RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group (CVEG) has considered and analyzed the future of subdivision in the reorganized, integrated RBMS Controlled Vocabulary (RBMS CV). This recommendation takes into account the expected release of the vocabulary as linked open data, and anticipates the future of bibliographic discovery, to the extent possible.

Recommendation

The CVEG does not recommend subdividing RBMS Controlled Vocabulary terms in OCLC master records. In order to do so in a linked data environment, the editorial group would need to establish and maintain geographical, chronological, etc. subdivisions, which is outside the scope of the vocabulary, and would also represent an enormous amount of work.

More immediately, in OCLC, pre-coordinated terms cannot be considered "controlled" when subdivided by terms from outside the vocabulary and as such should not be considered proper access points in OCLC master records.

Areas of the vocabulary that allow for or require other types of subdivision than chronological or geographical subdivision, such as subdividing watermarks by the image they display, will need to be analyzed individually, and are addressed later in this document under "future work."

The editorial subcommittee makes no recommendation regarding local subdivision practices, but cautions individual libraries that, moving forward, it may be difficult to reconcile uncontrolled subdivisions.

Process

The editorial group conducted a literature review on the advantages and disadvantages of pre- versus post-coordinated subject strings, as well as current best practices for use and development of faceted vocabularies. We examined subdivision use across existing major vocabularies, including AAT, LCGFT, TGM II, and LCSH. Additionally, the CVEG relied on our recent usage survey to gauge the importance of subdivision in the user community. We also examined known and anticipated use cases of subdivision within rare materials description.

Rationale

Pre-coordinated strings represent a potential liability in a linked data environment. Such subject headings have individual URIs, but do not have a collective identifier. Therefore, they remain "strings" that will be difficult, if not impossible, to incorporate into a linked data environment. Although some vocabularies, such as LCSH, have developed URIs for "complex subjects" the necessary work required to create such URIs for possible RBMS CV pre-coordinated strings is prohibitive.

Additionally, as noted above, the RBMS CV has not maintained separate terms that enable subdivision. The original application instructions indicate libraries should develop their own scheme for chronological subdivision, while relying on the Library of Congress Indirect Subdivision policy for geographical subdivision. This practice has resulted in uncontrolled construction of strings over time that will be even more unwieldy and problematic in a linked open data environment.The time and effort required to develop, implement and maintain controlled subdivision terms is highly prohibitive and not feasible for a small, volunteer organization.

However, the CVEG recognizes that certain use cases for subdivision, such as chronologically identifying an item-specific attribute (i.e. an annotation) represent information needs that cannot be captured in other ways in the existing encoding environment (i.e. MARC tags). We believe this to be a data modeling problem that should be addressed as efforts to improve bibliographic discovery overall proceed, rather than by further development of subdivision terms in the vocabulary.

The majority of these use cases cluster around physical features needing item-level rather than manifestation- or expression-level description. As such, these uses are not appropriate for inclusion in OCLC master records. A much smaller selection of use cases, most centering around genre, are expression- or manifestation-level descriptions where subdivision would arguably apply to the whole edition. In these cases CVEG judged that, for the purposes of faceting, many other MARC fields in master records already contain information critical to identifying examples of genre/form by geographic area or time period (e.g. 752 for structured geographic data). As such, little utility is added at the master record level by subdividing genre. CVEG fully acknowledges that individual institutions may have local subdivision strategies that are crucial in accessing collections, but advise that these be kept in individual ILS instances and explicitly coded as local practice henceforward.

Future work

The CVEG has developed the following recommendations for addressing areas of the Thesauri that currently require or allow for subdivision that is neither chronological or geographic.

Facsimiles: free floating subdivision
Recommendation: Eliminate option.
Considerations: This subdivision need is superseded by the option to include a "Facsimile" genre term, available in numerous controlled vocabularies. Presenting as a pre-coordinated string is not necessary.

Paper sizes: subdivide by dimensions
Recommendation: Eliminate term.

Considerations: The CVEG believes this information is best represented in a note field rather than as a controlled term. Furthermore, maintaining these terms would be nearly impossible since there are so many. Without the option to subdivide, this term does not serve a useful collocation purpose and deletion is recommended.

Leaf sizes: subdivide by dimensions
Recommendation: Eliminate term.
Considerations: See Paper sizes.

Sheet sizes: subdivide by dimensions
Recommendation: Eliminate term.
Considerations: See Paper sizes.

Line sizes: Line sizes should be subdivided by the size designation listed in the appendix
Recommendation: Eliminate term.
Considerations: See Paper sizes.

Point sizes: subdivided by one of the point size designation listed in the appendix
Recommendation: Eliminate term.
Considerations: See Paper sizes.

Account books: Specialized collections may wish to subdivide by specific types, e.g., "Account books $x Ledgers."
Recommendation: Specialized collections may request the addition of standalone terms necessary to represent the above-mentioned specific types.
Considerations: This use case is best accommodated by setting up the needed terms as individual terms, rather than pre-coordinated strings.

Legal instruments: May be subdivided by type of instrument, using the standard terms of the jurisdiction involved.
Recommendation: Specialized collections may request the addition of standalone terms necessary to represent the above-mentioned specific types.
Considerations: This use case is best accommodated by setting up the needed terms as individual terms, rather than pre-coordinated strings.

Bookbinding (Assign only with subdivisions): Use only with subdivisions, to identify noteworthy binding types, styles, and techniques which cannot be otherwise classified using terms on this list.
Recommendation: Eliminate term. Specialized collections may request the addition of standalone terms necessary to represent additional needs.
Considerations: This use case is best accommodated by setting up the needed terms. CVEG does not anticipate this work will be unduly onerous because many frequently used terms are already established. Without the subdivision option, this term lacks utility and deletion is recommended.

"Typefaces" which cataloguers may use to name undeniably identifiable typefaces. This term may be subdivided by the name of a specific typeface

Recommendation: Specialized collections may request the addition of standalone terms necessary to represent specific types. Additionally, the CVEG will investigate options for locating and adding commonly used terms.

Considerations: As a result of the recent survey and other community feedback, CVEG is very aware that the community uses this thesaurus, and are committed to being responsive to this need. It could be onerous to set up the number of required terms, however, especially if requests are made in bulk. The CVEG seeks additional feedback on how this term is used to further develop a recommendation.

Non-Latin characters: optionally, subdivide by a particular alphabet in |x.

Recommendation: Eliminate term. Libraries may request the addition of terms for specific character sets as needed.

Considerations: This term is recommended for deletion to minimize an inherent western European bias, but the CV should continue to fulfill this use case by representing these character sets with the same level of granularity as represented elsewhere in the vocabulary. The CVEG seeks additional feedback on how this term is used to further develop a recommendation.

Watermarks: Libraries may wish to subdivide the general term Watermarks by the images they portray.

Recommendation: Establish as standalone terms. A future subgroup of the CVEG may be tasked with this work.

Considerations: In order to ensure this section of the vocabulary has consistent and cohesive levels of detail, it is advisable to establish this vocabulary en masse, rather than by individual terms at the request of a specific library. As such, the CVEG recommends tasking a CVEG subgroup with this additional work.