Beth—August 27
Reply |Beth Picknally Camden to Michelle, MAGDA, Martin, John, Glenn
show details Aug 27

I thought that it might be useful to review the documents of the original group to refresh my memory of what we intended in making recommendation 11. My recollection is that the reason it was so broad was due to the fact that we had very little about subject access in our original report, but I found somewhat more than I remembered.

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The report is available at:
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alcts/ianda/nonenglish/07marchrpt.pdf

Here are the references to subject access:

p. 4 Executive summary   "Thought must also be given to providing multilingual and multiscript subject access."

p. 7 Recommendation 11:   "Assign the CCS Subject Analysis Committee (SAC), working with appropriate library organizations, to study the needs

of library users for multilingual subject access in the appropriate script(s), and to propose steps to address those needs.

Priority: Medium
Sources of expertise: CCS Subject Analysis Committee (SAC); ALA committees specializing in languages
other than English; IFLA Classification and Indexing Section; Library organizations in nations and regions where
a language is used
Interested parties: Libraries providing service to multilingual populations
Contingencies: None identified
Timeline: Beginning Summer/Fall 2007"

p. 8 Overview of the Current Situation
"For many years libraries in the United States have assumed that the language of the user was English. For this reason the
language of the catalog record and the language of the catalog interface have generally been English. Although many
libraries built collections in foreign language materials, the language of the catalog including subject access points has been
English."

p. 9 Non-English Support In Library Systems [This was based on a vendor survey]
"Searching with languages other than English was covered by questions about multilingual subject access. (If a system
has multilingual subject access, it is certain to have multilingual access by author and title as well.) All companies except
one provide subject access in languages other than English in their ILS, provided (as was pointed out by two respondents)
that records contain such data.
Of the systems providing multilingual subject access, five have authority control for subject access points, the other
responded "this is up to the library." Four systems had all languages in a single combined file (in one case, extraction by
language was supported); one system has "multiple subject thesaurus authority files," the remaining respondent said "this is
up to the library." "

p. 11 Conclusion
"In the context of English as the language of the catalog, provision for all languages and scripts includes:
1) for foreign language text, use of the script(s) in which the language is conventionally written;
2) authority control mechanisms to provide access by names and titles written in non-Latin scripts to the AACR2
form;
3) authority control mechanisms to provide access by foreign language subject terms in any script;
4) source records for cataloging of foreign language material, especially material in non-Latin scripts."

...

"Access by foreign language terms for subjects will require the relevant experts within ALA and other library groups to
agree on the subject headings list or thesaurus to be used for each language, with development of a list or thesaurus for a
language if necessary. The experience with multilingual subject access of libraries in other countries should be studied."

There are additional references in the appendix materials, regarding past activities of various organizations.

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In "Comments Received and Their Disposition" http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alcts/ianda/nonenglish/07rptcomments.pdf , there are two comments which may be helpful:

p. 3 Comment #5
Name: James E. Agenbroad
Institutional Affiliation: Retired
[Continuation of posting]
It would also be useful to clarify what is meant by "multilingual and multiscript subject access".
It could mean either: a) subject access for readers of foreign languages/scripts to library materials in foreign languages they could read via terms in their respective languages/scripts, or b) Access for readers of foreign
languages/scripts to ALL library materials via terms in their languages/scripts. In the first case Spanish, Chinese, etc. readers would get access via Spanish, Chinese or other terms to resources they could read only. In the second case they would get subject access to all library resources on topics of interest to them--
even those they could not read.
Disposition of comment #5
No change to the Executive Summary needed. The phrase covers both cases.

p.19-20 Comment #51
Name: Library of Congress
Topic: Scope of the group's charge
There is some ambiguity in the charge as to whether the "all language and scripts" applies to the library resources or to the enabling structure – indeed both surely apply. Users wanting the non-English access will hope to find the library systems in their language/script (if they are the target users of that library) and hope also to find materials in their language/script in the collections. We also hope there would be links in future systems to enable such users access to materials in other libraries and other information provider locations (Amazon, publishers, etc.). However, we want to caution that users may indeed be looking for or delighted to find non-English materials on a topic of interest, even if they cannot read that language or script.

As one of our staff noted, "So, for subject access, getting a vendor record that provides subject terms in Spanish or Italian as well as those we add in English (or adding them ourselves) is an enhancement for users operating in Spanish or Italian, but not so much for those operating in Thai or Dutch. Piecemeal solutions may add value that addresses needs in specific circumstances and may be worthwhile on that basis; but they may not be as satisfactory if we have broader expectations for resource sharing."
Disposition of comment #51
Noted.

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I found little in my e-mail files to enlighten this conversation, though I was reminded that I was responsible for the wording of the recommendation, with some input from the group.

So, where does that leave us?   The recommendation is very broad, but I think intentionally so--the key word is "study".   We need research in order to determine more precise steps, and SAC apparently doesn't do research. SAC expects the Steering Comm. to narrow the scope before they will take it on, but could we narrow it without some initial research?   It seems that we are stuck in a loop.

So, how important is this recommendation to ALCTS now in 2009?   Is there a real problem that needs addressing?   Is this just one of the many research questions about how patrons use catalogs that should be researched?   Has this been investigated already (has anyone done a literature search)?   At annual I heard something about 2010 as the "Year of Cataloging Research"--not sure who's working on this, but maybe we could get this topic on a list of potential research projects.

Given that we have a very short time left for this group, I wonder if the best that we can expect for this recommendation is to find someone/some group interested in exploring the topic, so that we can at least hand it off before we are done.