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A case of two discourses: The representation of the Canadian cultural divide in English and French subject headings
Discours en porte-à-faux: La dualité culturelle canadienne dans le système bilingue de vedettes-matière

Abstract: The discursive space of the Canadian bilingual cataloguing system is examined for its representation of the people who inhabit the cultural places of Canada and, specifically, Québec. The intellectual construct of Québec as a distinct society is measured against the discourse of the two organizations responsible for the CSH and RVM.
Résumé: L'espace discursif du système de catalogage bilingue canadien est étudié pour sa représentation des gens qui habitent les espaces culturels du Canada et, spécifiquement, du Québec. Le concept intellectuel de société distincte est mesuré aux discours des deux organismes responsables, respectivement, des CSH et du RVM.

1. Introduction

The inherently human biases of librarianship's controlled vocabularies have often come under scrutiny. Scholars such as Hope Olson (2000, 2002), Steven A. Knowlton (2005), and Joseph Deodato (in Leckie, Given, and Buschman 2010, 82-83), have built upon Sanford Berman's seminal text *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (1971, reprinted with corrections in 1993) to provide critical readings of these tools as semantic constructs.

Through a national and bilingual approach, this paper examines the relationship between the *Canadian Subject Headings* (CSH) and the *Répertoire de vedettes-matière* (RVM) as the parallel products of two distinct organizations, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and the Université Laval, that work together to construct a coherent discursive space: the Canadian, national, bilingual cataloguing system. Using a theoretical framework inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and Hope Olson, this paper shows how translation exacerbates the organizational and intellectual power of the people who label information and mold the reality and identity of those who use it. The terms used to describe the Québécois people and Québec as a distinct society are measured against the discourses that purport their supposed equivalencies in the national standards of a bilingual system serving all Canadians. It should be noted that the scope of this study does not cover the Aboriginal nations or the other peoples who make up Canada's multicultural landscape – topics which would certainly deserve future attention.

2. Theoretical and historical background

Through OPACs, the semantics behind the building of controlled vocabularies become a pragmatic representation of the world. We must then, as James Carey once said, take responsibility for shaping the world through our labels, espousing the view that

"language—communication—is a form of action—or, better, interaction—that not merely represents or describes but actually molds or constitutes the world" (Carey 1989, 64). By instructing users to utilize certain terminology, "[the controlled vocabulary] constructs the meanings of documents for users" (Olson 2000, 54-65).

In this case, the documents in question tell of a place whose history is as convoluted as it is passionately told, and of a cultural divide that persists since the defeat of the French troops on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. The term "distinct society" was first introduced by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1965 (O'Neal 1995, 6), which led to the Official Languages Act of 1969. With the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, the agenda to separate Québec from Canada and to see it rise as a sovereign nation took centre stage in Canadian politics, with referendums on what came to be known as "the national question" following in 1980 and 1995. Therefore, the notion of "distinct society" represents, historically, 200 years of being "other" but self-affirmed; it has culminated, so far, in a political impasse but in a rich dual culture.

Because of this cultural divide, the discrepancies and omissions, the *actes manqués* in the dialogue between controlled vocabularies construct not only a class structure (Bourdieu 1991, 105), but also, through the translation of one language (the dominant) to the other (the "second language") a "second class citizens" imbalance, namely because of the self-ascribed (rather than conferred) authority of our roles and tools (Williamson 1996, 160; Olson 2000, 58-59). This dynamic is inscribed in the very history of the Canadian bilingual indexing system and in the tandem which creates it.

3. Two places, one system: The narrative of intentions

Canadian federal and cultural institutions are, obviously, caught in the constant balancing act of catering to their national mandate while articulating the cultural otherness – in both official languages. This is certainly true of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) – a national library where librarians' objectivity is, perhaps, bound to be affected by cultural adherence as well as by their "own background, knowledge, culture, responsibilities, and even mood" (Taylor and Joudrey 2009, 313). Historically, CSH, the English-language headings, rapidly became the responsibility of the (then) National Library of Canada; yet LAC still, to this day, defers to the Université Laval for the development and maintenance of the French terms through RVM, which was recognized and adopted as the national standard in 1974 (Bélair et al. 2008, 7; Schweitzer 1995, 14).

This status notwithstanding, RVM serves, as per its stated purpose, "different publics" (Bélair et al 2008, xxi) and *ipso facto* different cultures: 1) the Americans, through the reference to LCSH; 2) the different national French-language libraries (Holley 2002, 147); 3) the Canadian, English-driven national catalogue which is meant to serve the information retrieval needs of a bilingual and culturally diverse society (Schweitzer 1995, 17); and, 4) the Québécois university. Bourdieu writes that dominant cultures can facilitate integration by "concealing the function of division beneath the function of communication" (1991, 167). Through its adoption of a translated tool which it does not own and which is not freely available to the Canadian public, LAC is advocating the communication necessary to its policy of unity and bilingualism, but acting as the instrument of division by legitimizing the other as requiring definition in relation to and within the dominant (English) culture.

4. Whose story? The tools of cultural division

In the 1962 edition of RVM, there was no *Québécois* heading (Bibliothèque de l'Université Laval 1962, 14). There was a *Canadien français* heading but nothing resembling *Canadiens Anglais*; the qualifier went to the home team, reproducing the dominant culture's bias.

By its 9th edition, in 1983, RVM did have a *Québécois* heading; but the English equivalent remained *Canadians, French-speaking* (Bibliothèque de l'Université Laval 1983, 977), a heading which lumped together people in and out of the province of Québec. Meanwhile, under the English heading *Canadians-French-speaking*, the cataloguer found both *Canadiens français* and *Québécois* – forcing a choice that could not have been more political in the wake of the 1980 referendum.

Today, the "second class" structure finds itself reversed in the headings pertaining to Anglophones living in Québec: *Canadiens anglais—Québec* is the authorized term; yet Francophones are not *Canadiens français—Québec* – that term is obsolete. According to RVM, the divide is a linguistic one: Anglophones are *Canadiens anglais* and Francophones are *Québécois*.

The body politic is not such a straightforward zone either. A search for *Fédéralisme* in RVM lists *Federal government* as the English LCSH and CSH equivalents, a clear non-equivalency between an ideology or political structure and a political apparatus. The political products of the cultural divide also create biases of interpretation: Québec has had a national holiday since 1977, and the heading *Fête nationale du Québec* reflects its official name; in CSH, the equivalent remains *St. Jean Baptiste Day*, a designation which refers to the religious holiday which occurs on the same date.

There is no omission more blatant, however, than that of the terms "distinct society" and "société distincte". LAC purports that, "Topical headings included in CSH appear solely in their Canadian context, via the addition of the subdivision –Canada or other qualifier (but neither is added if the topic is unmistakably Canadian" (LAC 2010a). It thus becomes imperative to try and understand why *Distinct society* does not qualify. Bending the concept to be *Nationalism—Québec (Province)* or *Relations fédérales-provinciales—Québec (Province)* or calling it, in French, *Biculturalisme—Canada* is an act of utterance telling those thinkers and writers and patrons who use the term in their works and searches that the distinct society does not, in fact, exist – not in information's official discursive space, anyway. In terms of representation, it is another defeat of the Québécois nation, one by semantic omission.

5. Conclusion

As the products of national libraries, rooted in cultural places, our catalogues are the locus of our national discourse and must be discussed as such. Self-ascribed though it may have been at first, our role has become that of Bourdieu's "authorized spokesperson": it is, indeed, "incumbent [on us] to speak on behalf of the community. Is if both [our] privilege and [our] duty, [our] proper function, in a word, [our] competence (in the legal sense of the term)" (1991, 121). As national bibliographers especially, librarians, the proverbial gatekeepers, have been "instituted" into the privilege and duty

of representing our community – and communities –, of naming the people and places which make up our society. Olson (2002) told us of the power we hold; indeed, in naming, we define both the world of knowledge and the people who use it. This tightrope act, rooted in perceptions and inextricable from the process of integration, is crucial to the "political domination that is endlessly reproduced by institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of the dominant language" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 46). In Canada, these institutions, these places, have the added responsibility of a shared discursive space, one which should constantly be questioned to ensure that it is not the tool of assimilation but the space of a true cultural dialogue.

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