DATE: January 22, 2013

TO: RDA Subcommittee

SUBJECT: Treatment of Subjects in RDA

This discussion paper is concerned with the treatment of subjects in RDA. It recommends the adoption of the FRSAD (Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data) model proposed by the IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Records (FRSAR)[[1]](#footnote-1). In this model there are two entities, Thema and Nomen which replace the 4 entities comprising the Group 3 entities of the FRBR model (Concept, Object, Event and Place).

Thema is defined as “any entity used as a subject of work”. Nomen is defined as “any sign or sequence of signs (alphanumeric characters, symbol, sound, etc.) that a thema is known by, referred to or addressed as”. A Thema can be any FRBR Group 1 or Group 2 entity or any other entities that are used as subjects of works (such as the Group 3 entities). The problem with the FRBR Group 3 entities is that they apply to only a few of the possible subject heading systems, thesauri, classification systems, etc. that might be used by catalogers or metadata specialists. As Barbara Tillett points out in her discussion paper[[2]](#footnote-2), RDA should not be used to proscribe the choice and form of terms used to name subjects or other rules that are in the domain of subject heading systems, thesauri, classification systems, etc. This principle should also be extended to categorizing entities that are in the domain of subject systems. The FRSAR report provides numerous examples of subject systems that use entities that differ from the FRBR Group 3 entities.

Below are listed some consequences and recommendations that would be the result of adopting the FRSAD model.

1. The FRBR Group 3 entities (Concept, Object, Event and Place) would no longer be entities. They could become values of the Type attribute in some subject systems. There would no longer be a need to define a Time entity. It could become another value of the Type attribute in some subject systems.
2. Instead of using the terms Thema and Nomen, subject and name should be used in English language versions of RDA. Versions of RDA in other languages would use the appropriate equivalents for subject and name.
3. Chapter 12 (General Guidelines on Recording Attributes of Concepts, Objects, Events and Places) would have a new title: “General Guidelines on Recording Attributes of Subjects”
4. Subjects are related to works only. They are not related to expressions, manifestations or items.
5. Subjects describe what a work is about. Subjects do not specify what a work is (i.e., it’s form or genre). The form and genre of a work or expression should be treated in a separate chapter of RDA.
6. The four user tasks specified by FRSAR (Find, Identify, Select and Explore ) for subject authority data should be listed and explained.
7. Core Elements.

These are based on the attributes for Thema and Nomen proposed by FRSAR. RDA could specify values for these elements for Group 1 and 2 entities. For other subject entities RDA should not provide instructions for the values of these elements, nor for the choice and form of the name used to represent a subject. Choice and form of a name as well as rules for forming names of subjects are in the domain of subject heading lists, thesauri, classification systems, etc.

Type: These could be the FRBR Group 1 and 2 entities, and in certain implementations the FRBR Group 3 entities. However other subject systems and implementations would require different entities.

Preferred Name of the Subject

Identifier for the Name

Scheme (e.g., LCSH, MeSH, AAT, etc.)

Reference Source for the Name

Language of the Name

Time Validity of the Name (e.g., until May 11, 1949, after 1945, 1945-1967)

Status of the Name (e.g., proposed, accepted, obsolete)

1. Other Elements/Attributes

Scope Note

Representation of the Name (e.g., alphanumeric, sound, graphic)

Script of the Name (e.g., Cyrillic, Thai, Chinese (Traditional))

Script Conversion (e.g., Pinyin)

Form of Name (e.g., full name, abbreviation, formula)

Audience

1. Chapters concerning subjects would have new titles and in most cases would have to be renumbered. Also appropriate content for these chapters would have to be developed.

Chapter 13 (Identifying Concepts) would have a new title: “Identifying Subjects”.

Chapter 14 (Identifying Objects) would be deleted.

Chapters 15 (Identifying Events), and 16 (Identifying Places) could remain. Alternatively their content could be included in Chapter 13 as special instructions for Events and Places similar to how legal and religious works are treated in Chapter 6.

Chapter 23 (General Guidelines on Recording the Subject of a Work) could remain, although it may have to be renumbered if some of the other chapters are deleted. Obviously if some chapters are deleted, chapters 17-22 and 24-32 would have to renumbered as well.

Chapter 33 (General Guidelines on Recording Relationships between Concepts, Objects, Events and Places) would have a new title and it would have to be renumbered.

Chapters 34-37 would be deleted.

Appendix L (Relationship Designators: Relationships Between Concepts, Objects, Events and Places) would have a new title: “Relationship Designators: Relationships Between Subjects”.

1. *Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data (FRSAD): a Conceptual Model.* (2010). IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements of Subject Authority Records (FRSAR). International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Available at: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/classification-and-indexing/functional-requirements-for-subject-authority-data/frsad-final-report.pdf> (accessed 2013-01-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tillett, Barbara. (2011). *Chapters 12-16, 23, 33-37 (Group 3 entities and “subject”).* Discussion paper for the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA. May 20, 2011. (RDA document series 6JSC/LC/rep/3) p. 5. Available at: <http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/6JSC-LC-rep-3.pdf> (accessed 2013-01-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)