TO: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA

FROM: Subject Analysis Committee, Cataloging and Metadata Management Section, Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, American Library Association

SUBJECT: Treatment of Subjects in RDA

This discussion paper recommends that RDA adopt 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 prescribe 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.

If the FRSAD model is adopted for RDA, it is also recommended that:

1. The JSC continue its policy of providing basic guidance within RDA for general libraries and others while referring to specialist manuals, etc. (in this case other thesauri, subject heading lists, classification systems, etc.) for more specific instructions on form/structure of terminology, relationships among subject terms, and rules for using any particular subject heading list, thesaurus, classification system, taxonomy, etc.[[3]](#footnote-3)
2. The FRSAD terms “Thema” and “Nomen” should be replaced by the terms “Subject” and “Name”. The alignment of RDA with FRSAD and the relation between the RDA terms, Subject and Name, and the FRSAD terms, Thema and Nomen could be explained in the introductory chapter as a sub-section of 0.3 “Conceptual Models Underlying RDA” .
3. The four user tasks specified by FRSAR (Find, Identify, Select and Explore) for subject authority data should be listed and explained in RDA. The four user tasks are listed below:

**Find** one or more subjects and their appellations, that correspond(s) to the user’s stated criteria, using attributes and relationships.

**Identify** a subject and/or its appellations based on its attributes or relationships (i.e., to distinguish between two or more subjects or appellations with similar characteristics and to confirm that the appropriate subject or appellation has been found).

**Select** a subject and/or its appellation appropriate to the user’s needs (i.e., to choose or reject based on the user’s requirements and needs).

**Explore** relationships between subjects and/or their appellations.

1. The JSC should consider extending the FRSAD user task Explore to FRBR Group 1 and Group 2 entities as well.
2. There will be only one Subject entity in RDA. The FRSAD entity Nomen (Name) will be become an attribute of the Subject entity. The FRBR Group 3 entities (Concept, Object, Event and Place) would not be entities in RDA.
3. Subjects should be related only to works. They should not be related to expressions, manifestations or items. If an expression/manifestation includes subject content that is different from the work on which it is based, it should be treated as a new work.
4. Subject entities describe what a work is about. They do not specify what a work is (i.e., its form or genre). The form and genre of a work or expression should be treated in a separate chapter of RDA.
5. Most of the chapters dealing with subjects in RDA could be eliminated. Perhaps only three chapters would be needed: a chapter on general guidelines for recording attributes of subjects; a chapter on the recording of the subject(s) of a work; and a chapter on general guidelines for recording relationships between subjects. Instructions covering events as subjects (currently Chapters 15 and 36) could be included in the chapters on general guidelines for recording attributes and relationships of subjects.
6. Since RDA specifies a number of uses for Place, it would be necessary to retain the content of Chapter 16 dealing with places and to develop instructions on relationships between places (currently intended for Chapter 37). Further discussion by the JSC on the treatment of Place in RDA is needed.

Possible attributes of the subject entity are listed below. With the exception of name they correspond to the attributes of thema and nomen in the FRSAD model. The sections in the FRSAD report that explain the attributes are provided. The JSC will have to determine which of the attributes should be included in RDA, and which should be core elements. Attributes that could be candidates for core elements in RDA are indicated by an asterisk \*. Attributes that could be considered data about data are indicated by a plus sign +.

Type of subject [FRSAD 4.1.1] \* +

(These could be the FRBR Group 1 and Group 2 entities, and in certain implementations the FRBR Group 3 entities. However other subject systems and implementations would require different values for this attribute.)

Scope Note [FRSAD 4.1.2] +

Name of subject \*

--which has the following subtypes

Preferred name of subject \*

Variant name of subject

--and has the following attributes

Type of Name [FRSAD 4.2.1]

--which has the following subtypes

Identifier of name (this is a general RDA attribute) \*

Controlled access point (see Preferred name of subject) \*

Scheme (LCSH, MeSH, AAT, etc.) [FRSAD 4.2.2] \* +

Source consulted [FRSAD 4.2.3 “Reference source of nomen”] +

(This is a general RDA attribute applicable to any authorized access point)

Representation of name [FRSAD 4.2.4] +

Language of name [FRSAD 4.2.5] +

Script of name [FRSAD 4.2.6] +

Script conversion [FRSAD 4.2.7] +

Form of name (e.g., full, abbreviated, formula, etc.) [FRSAD 4.2.8] +

Time validity of name [FRSAD 4.2.9]

Audience [FRSAD 4.2.10] +

Status of identification [FRSAD 4.2.11] +

(This is also a general RDA attribute)

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)
3. *Ibid.,* p.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)