Folktales & Folksonomies: Investigating the Utility of Tags as a Means of Description for Folktales

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This research considers the utility of folksonomies as a means of augmenting access to a collection of folktale resources. Catalog records for item classed as folktales often contain sparse information about facets of the stories (e.g., characters, setting, cultural or geographic origins of a tale, moral, motif) that may be valuable to users of these resources. The Folktales, Facets, & FRBR Project[1] seeks to improve access to items in the Center for Children's Books (CCB) folktales collection through the enhancement of existing catalog records for these items. Folksonomies may serve as one means of augmenting records for this collection. Facet analysis may aid in identifying areas in which folksonomies may provide particularly rich sources of data for enhancing item records.

Prior work with the CCB folktales books included a facet analysis of 100 titles[2] from the collection. From this analysis, an initial set of 12 top-level categories was established. Catalog records for the 100 items were then analyzed with these facet categories serving as a framework for the analysis. It was found that certain facets (e.g., author, type of story, cultural or geographic origins of a story) were well represented in the standard bibliographic data found in catalog records. Conversely, information about characters, setting, and audience was very sparsely represented in the records. Subject information was found in approximately one third of the records. Facets such as motif, moral, and illustrations were not at all represented.

To examine the use of folksonomies with the CCB folktales collection, LibraryThing for Libraries was installed into the collection's Koha (open source ILS) OPAC. LibraryThing for Libraries[3] is a series of bibliographic enhancements that display LibraryThing tags on existing catalog records. Catalog records from 100 books

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[1] Currently underway at the Center for Children's Books, Graduate School of Library & Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Professors Kathryn La Barre and Carol Tilley are the principal co-investigators. More information is available at:
http://cirss.lis.illinois.edu/CollMeta/Folktales.html

[2] There are approximately 1500 items total in the CCB folktales collection.

[3] More information on LibraryThing for Libraries can be found at: http://www.librarything.com/forlibraries/

from in the collection were examined, and all LibraryThing tags displayed on each record were recorded in a database[4]. Facet analysis was conducted on these tags, with the facet categories established in the earlier analysis providing a guide for the present analysis.

Initial results of the analysis indicated that the folksonomic tags most frequently fell into the facet categories of type of story, subject, characters, geographic and cultural references, and type of book. In particular, tags provided better descriptive data for the facets of subject, characters, and type of story. It was observed that the ambiguity of tags may be problematic for categories such as geographic and cultural references (e.g., the tag "Russia" may indicate the country of origin of a story, or its setting). The analysis of the LibraryThing tags also revealed some additional categories (e.g., mood, textual elements) not found in the initial facet analysis performed on the 100-book sample. Further analysis of LibraryThing tags on items in the CCB folktales collection may be of use to draw out additional facet categories that would enhance access to items in this collection.

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[4] Due to the limitations of LibraryThing for Libraries, only 59 titles had any tag data displayed on their records.