Representation of Indigenous Stories in Cultural Heritage Digital Libraries: A Metadata Approach

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Introduction

Following Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, there has been significant growth in the number of cultural heritage digital libraries and archives that focus on the collection, digitization, organization, and discoverability of Indigenous content and stories. For instance, in a recent study of mapping Canada's Indigenous digital collections, over 120 Indigenous digital collections were identified that categorized by communities, namely Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit. (Shiri, Borys, & Huang, 2019). This significant growth in Indigenous digital collections calls for the conceptualization and operationalization of more inclusive knowledge organization methods and approaches that are community-driven, culturally hospitable, and relevant. More specifically, we are interested in the ways in which Indigenous stories could be organized and represented in cultural heritage libraries to support access and findability. While there are a number of Indigenous digital storytelling systems in Canada, Australia and the US that adopt some form of metadata, they tend to mainly focus on audio/video file type, format and size rather than the content. In this presentation, our focus is on identifying metadata elements in Indigenous stories as shared by elders in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of Canada's Western Arctic.

Context

The histories of Indigenous communities have long been excluded or misconstrued in institutionalized settings and have thus been taken to the grassroots, community level for autonomous documentation (Flinn, Stevens, & Shepherd, 2009). Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action stress the importance of providing the opportunity to record, document and preserve "Aboriginal peoples' inalienable right to know the truth about what happened and why, with regard to human rights violations committed against them in the residential schools" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.8). A nationwide effort to address this important area is evidenced by the formation of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' (CFLA-FCAB) Truth & Reconciliation Committee, whose responsibility is to work with Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) people to address issues related to libraries, archives, and cultural memory institutions (Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2017). Indigenous communities around the world have been taking up digital media in their broader struggles for decolonization, self representation, and self-determination (Ginsburg, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2013). The importance of community networking and community building in the development of digital libraries and archives is widely emphasized in the literature (Caidi & Clement, 2004; Williams, 2015; Aparac-Jelušić, 2017). Digital storytelling is a powerful technique and has tremendous potential for Indigenous communities who are increasingly leveraging technology to pass on and generate knowledge on their own terms (Christie, 2004; Christen, 2015; Stevens, 2008). For Indigenous peoples in particular, story is a critical method of sharing and preserving knowledge, culture, and history (Littletree& Metoyer, 2015;

Srinivasan, 2017). Currently, there is limited research on culturally appropriate, multidisciplinary and participatory approaches to developing user-friendly digital storytelling functionalities within digital libraries and archives for real-time capturing of Inuit oral cultural heritage, in particular within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in Canada's Western Arctic.

Research Objective

As part of a larger research project that aims to develop a digital storytelling system for the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) in Canada's Western Arctic, we have been exploring approaches and methods for organizing and representing Indigenous elder stories in the [Inuvialuit Digital Library](https://inuvialuitdigitallibrary.ca/)[1] to enhance the community-driven, culturally appropriate, and relevant metadata and description framework being developed (Farnel, 2020). Through an examination of a select number of Indigenous stories told by the elders in the ISR, we aim to develop a faceted framework for the organization and representation of Indigenous stories.

Methodology

Informed by Indigenous and community-based research methodologies, this study adopted ethnography and participatory methods to gather stories by Inuvialuit Settlement Region elders in order to inform the design and development of a digital storytelling user interface for the Inuvialuit Digital Library. Ethnography was employed to conduct observation, informal conversations, and interviews at the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre (ICRC) in Inuvik. Participatory research focuses on understanding community needs and engaging community members in all research activities to address the needs (Park, 1993, 1999).

Since the focus of this presentation is on knowledge organization and more specifically on metadata elements in Indigenous stories, we will discuss the following:

- Community-driven ethnography and participatory design methodology
- Elders storytelling workshop that was held in November 2019 to capture stories of 12 elders representing six communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement.
- A preliminary analysis of the key metadata elements extracted from the stories using the facet analysis technique (Hjørland, 2013, Smiraglia, 2015).
- Provide examples of Indigenous digital storytelling systems that have implemented metadata elements
- Share our experience of defining metadata frameworks in the process of creating the Inuvialuit Digital Library.

Preliminary results

The stories told throughout the gathering were many and various. They covered the joys and challenges of life on the land, local legends and tales, stories of community heroes, drum dancing and traditional games, language learning and loss. An initial examination of the stories

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[1] The Inuvialuit Digital Library (https://inuvialuitdigitallibrary.ca/) is an ongoing collaborative project between the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre and researchers and librarians from the University of Alberta. It includes many of the Centre's resources, including language lessons, books, photo collections, videos, and audio files, and is based on a community driven knowledge organization and resource description framework.

told by the Inuvialuit elders shows an interesting set of metadata elements (in addition to more standard elements such as the name of the storyteller, when the story was told, and in what language) that could be organized using such key facets as object, property, operation, process action, agent, time, space. This kind of facet analysis of Indigenous stories may contribute to the development of a metadata and description framework for Inuvialuit knowledge organization and representation that is culturally relevant and appropriate and is derived from the actual stories told by the elders.

Property: Types of weather, winter, summer, fall, types of cold and types of snow

Action and operations: hunting, gathering, cooking, warming, building

Agent: elders, relatives, cousins, brothers, sisters, RCMP, government agencies, Priests

Animals: Caribou, Bear, Beluga whale, ducks

Objects: Ulu, harpoon, schooner

Places (Space): towns, villages, hamlets, oceans, lakes, Islands, Inuvialuit communities (Paulatuk, Ulukhaktok, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik, and Aklavik), residential schools – examples Herschel Island, Banks Island, churches, schools, igloos

Time: decades, years

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