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PRODUCING DISCURSIVE CHANGE:
FROM “ILLEGAL ALIENS” TO “UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRATION” IN LIBRARY
CATALOGS

by

JOOAH SILVIA CHO

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies
in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Producing Discursive Change:

From “Illegal aliens” to “Unauthorized immigration” in Library Catalogs

by

Jooah Silvia Cho

Advisor: Mehdi Bozorgmehr

Recent debates on immigration policies have included a discursive contest over the representation of unauthorized immigrants, in both the news media and the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), a subject indexing system administered by the Library of Congress. Using a mixed methods approach from a critical discourse analysis perspective, I examine the responses of the news media and the Library of Congress to societal pressures for change, showing how the Library’s complex institutional position can constrain its responses. Those obstacles, when combined with the characteristics of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as a linguistic tool for information retrieval, mean that the LCSH can legitimize and reinforce established discourses. While the LCSH’s power is mitigated by the coexistence of many other systems of knowledge representation, the LCSH continue to be an influential system, and it is important to consider how and why some changes can be difficult to make in this classification system.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Melissa Padilla, an undergraduate student at Dartmouth University, noticed that much of the material she was finding at her library for a research project was described as treating the topic of “illegal aliens” (Peet 2016).¹ Working with the student group Coalition for Immigration Reform, Equality, and DREAMers (CoFIREd), Padilla brought this description to the attention of her librarians at Dartmouth and asked how they might be changed (Peet 2016; *The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016). The issue and procedures turned out to be much more complex—and to have a far broader scope—than Padilla first imagined. The term she observed in the library catalog is one entry in a vast set of standard vocabulary, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), administered by the Library of Congress and adopted by many libraries in the United States and beyond to describe subjects treated in published material (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016).

Padilla found enthusiastic support from Dartmouth librarians who helped request a change of the subject heading. The Library of Congress initially declined the change, but additional mobilizations by librarians, resulting in an official American Library Association (ALA) resolution urging that the terminology change be reconsidered, caused the Library of Congress to call a stakeholders’ meeting after which it declared that the subject heading **Illegal aliens**² would be changed to **Noncitizens** and **Unauthorized immigration** and derivatives (Peet 2016). The Library of Congress’s March 2016 declaration, though carefully worded and justified, provoked an unprecedented reaction

¹ A *New York Times* article cites 2014 as the date in which Padilla first noticed the

² Individual Library of Congress subject headings are stylized in bold. terminology (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016).

² Individual Library of Congress subject headings are stylized in bold.

in the United States Congress, the Library of Congress's overseer and funder. Some legislators wrote a direct letter to the Acting Librarian of Congress, objecting to the change. Even more importantly, they introduced language to the U.S. House of Representatives' 2017 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, which covers funding for the Library, obligating it to retain federal law terminology such as "illegal aliens" (Aguilera 2016). An effort to oppose the inclusion of such a provision failed narrowly (House Report No. 114-594). Nonetheless, the Senate version of the Appropriations bill does not include such a requirement, so it remains to be seen whether the provision will remain in the reconciled version when it becomes law.

This swift and sharp political reaction to one change among many in an indexing system is extraordinary; it is the first time that Congress has attempted to intervene directly in the Library of Congress's management of subject headings, even though the LCSH have gone through other socially significant changes, such as the elimination of "Negro," "retard," or "insanity," in the past (Aguilera 2016; House Report No. 114-594). Congress's unusual response in the terminology describing unauthorized immigrants is reflective of how highly charged immigration debates have become in recent years, focusing intense and polarized political debates since the Obama administration's immigration reform efforts and into the 2016 presidential electoral campaigns.

The debates have most often surrounded the status and fate of unauthorized immigrants (see, *e.g.*, Liptak and Shear 2016). A corollary strand in the debates has been a discursive contest over terminology, the language used to describe unauthorized immigrants, with a return of the term "illegal aliens" in the political speech of some presidential candidates, and campaigns launched to discourage the use of "illegal" in

association to immigrants in the news media. The campaigns were mostly successful in leading the news media to critically examine their use of such terminology, and resulted in the position change of many influential news media organizations. Through Melissa Padilla's actions, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) have become the next site of discursive contest. In this thesis I examine those processes of change, as well as how the LCSH system works to produce and reinforce normative meanings.

Taking a broader perspective, the LCSH are only one of many coexisting systems of knowledge organization in an ever-expanding information landscape. They are used as a discovery tool by a relatively small number of information seekers, and only in library catalogs. Nonetheless, the LCSH are influential and highly visible, being seen in the majority of library catalogs in the United States, and it is important that the messages that they convey be critically examined. Librarians, long cognizant of their role, have contributed many challenges over time, and, as shown in the present challenge, continue to do so (see, *e.g.*, Shubert 1992; Olson 2002; Fischer 2005; Knowlton 2005). In the congressional debates over the issue, each side accused the other of politicizing the issue. However, words are never apolitical. Each choice of terminology constructs a representation, and in the present challenge, every step taken, from Padilla's original challenge, through the librarians' mobilization, to the congressional actions, constituted productions, reproductions and contestations of discourse about immigration.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I attempt to answer two questions using the example of the recent challenges over the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) term **Illegal aliens**:

- How does the institutional position of the Library of Congress shape its ability to reflect social change in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), a system it administers?
- How do the LCSH, a linguistic tool for information retrieval, influence discourse on immigration?

To answer the first question, I will compare and contrast the responses and processes of two news media organizations and of the Library of Congress, all of which were challenged to change the terminology they used to describe unauthorized immigrants.

To answer the second question, I will present a study of how the LCSH convey meaning through its structures in the immediate context of use of library catalogs.

METHODOLOGY

To draw connections between the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as text, and relate it to their context of use, institutional framework, and larger social context, I employed a mixed methods approach. Throughout this thesis, evidence was drawn from primary sources and secondary literature. In addition, I conducted database search studies in two parts. The first study was conducted for the section *Challenges and Responses: News Media Organizations* (pp. 25-31), to show the effects of the 2012-2013 campaign against the use of “illegal” terminology to refer to immigrants on the news media. In it, I gathered the frequency with which certain phrases appeared in news media articles between 2010-2015. Below are the full parameters:

- **Period:** 2010-2015 (6 full calendar years).

- **Change over time:** Results were grouped by full calendar years.
- **News organizations:** I chose *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, because they are two representative high profile news outlets, which each chose a different approach in the face of the activist campaigns. *The Los Angeles Times* officially dropped “illegal” terminology in 2012, while *The New York Times*, which did not, pledged instead to use more options and to provide greater contextualization.
- **Data sets:** I used ProQuest newspaper datasets through the New York Public Library subscription, the *ProQuest National Newspapers Premier: Los Angeles Times* (covering 1985-Present), and *ProQuest: New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)* (covering 1980-Present).
- **Sample:** I limited my study to a defined sample, articles indexed with either of two database subject headings, “aliens” or “immigration policy,” as a proxy representing articles treating the subject of immigration. This was done to exclude any unrelated results (for example, articles containing the word “undocumented” without relationship to immigration or immigrants, though presumed to be rare).
- **Search scope:** I searched for these phrases in the full text of articles.
- **Limitations of the study:** this study gathers frequencies, no more. No analysis was done to single out reflexive use (in quotations), nor other contextual information. The intention was to obtain, simply, a picture of the relative frequencies with which alternative terminologies appear in the public

narrative through articles from these news media outlets, and the change of those frequencies over time.

- **Terminology:** I selected phrases of most relevance to both representation in the media and in library classification:
 - “Illegal immigrant” (and plural): chosen because it was the predominant term in the media according to previous studies;
 - “Undocumented”: alternative proposed by activist groups;
 - “Unauthorized immigrant” (and plural): recently chosen alternative for library classification;
 - “Illegal alien” (and plural): recently challenged library classification terminology.

All four terms refer to persons, rather than to acts. Also, “undocumented” could be used without an associated noun by limiting the sample to articles dealing with the subject of immigration, as explained above.

As an example, the “illegal immigrant(s)” search string for *The New York Times* was as follows:

Advanced Search >

Pubid (11561)

AND (aliens OR “immigration policy”) in Subject heading (all) - SU

AND (“illegal immigrant” OR “illegal immigrants”) in Document text – FT

Publication: Specific date range

Start January 1 2010

End December 31 2015

A second study was conducted for the *Structures in Use* section (pp. 44-48) to show how users are structurally directed to the use of the standard subject heading in library catalogs, the LCSH's context of use, thus affecting their ability to find material and reinforcing normativity of standard terms. Below are the full parameters:

- **Period:** 2014-2016
- **Catalog:** Worldcat, a publicly available cooperative catalog
(www.worldcat.org)
- **Search type:** Subject searches: searching for the given terms only in the Subject field of catalog records;
- **Search limiters:**
 - Advanced Search screen:
 - Year: 2014 to 2016
 - Audience: Non-Juvenile
 - Content: Non-fiction
 - Format: Book
 - Facet in Results: limit to print books (Format > Book > Print Book).³
- **Terminology:**
 - “Illegal aliens”: the official subject heading in LCSH
 - “Illegal immigrants”: a recognized variant in LCSH
 - “Unauthorized immigrants”: as of yet, an unrecognized term in LCSH.

³ This was necessary to exclude full text searching of ebooks, to identify only keyword searching in metadata fields in catalog records to show the effects of LCSH use in cataloging.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Background: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

To study how discourse about immigration is produced, reproduced and challenged in the Library of Congress Subject Headings, I use critical discourse analysis as the primary framework. Following Fairclough (2015)'s call, I attempt to draw a connection between LCSH as a text to the larger social context, showing how LCSH has drawn and continues to draw from narratives available in the historical social context. Thus, I describe the LCSH as text, considering both its form, content, and context of use, and discuss how meaning is produced and transmitted in each of those dimensions. I also discuss the LCSH in relation to power, and I do so by describing its institutional framework and its place within the context of the larger system of schemes of knowledge organization. Finally, I discuss the subject heading **Illegal Alien** in the broader social context, considering the historical and current narratives that the LCSH draw from.

In the seminal book *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Norman Fairclough (1995) called for the study of *texts* from a critical course analysis perspective, arguing that it would contribute to social scientific research. For one, texts are a major source of evidence, being “sensitive barometers of social processes, movement and diversity” (p.209). Moreover, texts do not only reflect or mirror social processes, but are a form of social action themselves, with the “social and ideological ‘work’ that language does in producing, reproducing or transforming social structures, relations and identities is routinely ‘overlooked’” (Fairclough 1995:208).

Moreover, he observed that discursive productions are laden with power: “social control and domination are exercised, negotiated and resisted through texts” (Fairclough

1995:209). Therefore, Given (2008) observed when applying critical discourse analysis to the study of History that the task is to “uncover and critique the technologies of power that have come to legitimate certain ideas as truths,” and “expose history as a genre—contingent, ambiguous, and interpretive” (Given 2008:393).

In doing so, critical discourse analysis also uncovers minoritarian voices that contest the narrative of dominant powers, incorporating “hitherto disregarded and discounted sources and stories for occurrences and practices” (Given 2008:394). Public political discourse has the form of a conversation, “in which discourse strategies or moves on the part of one organization... provoke responses from others (Fairclough 1995: 202). In sum,

... language and discourse are viewed not as impartial tools that describe reality, but as constitutive modes of power that construct reality in unequal ways, demarcating the center from the periphery, truth from opinion, and reality from interpretation. Discourses are understood as central modes and components of the production, maintenance, and conversely, resistance to systems of power and inequality; no usage of language is considered a neutral, impartial, or apolitical act. (Given 2008:394)

Furthermore, historical discourse analysis studies discourses as systems of representations, often examining “how a particular category of subject (e.g., the child, the immigrant, the insane, the criminal, the dependent, the homosexual, etc.) and subject categories (e.g., race, culture, gender, age, sexuality, etc.) become constructed” (Hall 1997; Given 2008:395).

Many scholars have done important work on the discursive construction of unauthorized international migrants in the United States. My intention in this thesis is to contribute to the literature by considering the Library of Congress Subject Headings, a system of knowledge organization and representation, as a site of discursive production,

reproduction and transformation. The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are a widely used standardized system of subject indexing produced to allow users to discover materials on the topic of their interest when searching library catalogs. LCSH convey meaning in its terminology, organizing structures and hierarchies, and contexts of use, and can be considered, at some level, a linguistic genre.

The LCSH are also contested. Librarians, while appreciative of the work ultimately performed to connect users to the materials they seek, have critically examined how meanings in library and information resources are interpreted, organized, and presented to the user, and challenged LCSH's representations on behalf of minority views⁴. In particular, the recent challenges and political actions over the LCSH term **Illegal aliens**, taken by student activists, librarians, professional bodies, and U.S. legislators, are a highly visible example that illustrate processes of discourse production, maintenance and challenge in LCSH, and in systems of knowledge representation in general.

The Library of Congress Subject Headings: An Introduction

The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are a system of subject indexing adopted by many libraries in the United States and abroad to organize materials (books, media, journal titles and more) in their library catalogs. Under this system, published material deemed to deal with the same (or similar) subjects are gathered under *subject headings*, standard terms agreed upon to represent to each subject or topic within a catalog or an index (Olson 2001:640).

⁴ See, e.g., Shubert 1992; Olson 2002; Fischer 2005; Knowlton 2005.

The LCSH are one of tools that librarians use to provide subject access—*i.e.*, to allow information seekers to discover related information grouped under the same subject heading (Olson 2001:640). The intellectual organization of related material for discovery and access is important for all information resources, and it has long been an essential function of libraries (see Lesk 2005:117). Libraries are not simply storage places for materials; in the words of Goodrum, a historian of the Library of Congress, “[it] is what is in the books that justifies the Library, and it is the securing of their contents, organizing them so they can be found, and then providing the answers to the specialists who need them that is the sole reason for its being” (1974:4). Information must be organized if it is to be retrieved, and the three most frequent ways scholarly materials are searched is by known title, by known author, or by subject or topic. Of these, the labeling of information by the subject or topic of its content is the most challenging, and it is what LCSH are designed to tackle.

Until the first half of the twentieth century, there was an essentialist view, believing that all knowledge could be organized.⁵ Since then, however, essentialism has “almost disappeared in [knowledge organization]” (Hjørland 2012:310). Librarians working in the twenty-first century are far less sanguine about their ability to objectively wrangle all knowledge, being aware that organizing materials for discovery and access requires synthesis, judgment, inclusion or exclusion, and naming at every turn—all

⁵ For example, in twelfth century China, the scholar Zheng Qiao observed that book classification by subject, involving a “...clear arrangement of all knowledge, and full understanding of the origin and development of learning,” amounted to “an organization of knowledge” itself (Kuang 1991:368)

subjective activities that must end in definitive choices, while cognizant that “different sciences, theories, and human activities classify the world (more or less) differently” (Hjørland 2012:310). Moreover, these choices must be made using words to refer to concepts—when both carry meanings that are contingent, unstable across time and across social and cultural contexts, and laden with connotations relating to hierarchies and power.

Despite these impossibilities, the need to use language to describe and organize materials for discovery and access remains unchanged if content is to be made available for users—and librarians must try for the best that is achievable. There being no magic words that uniquely, perfectly, objectively and permanently describe unique, perfect, objective and permanent concepts, librarians (and other indexers) have developed a standard set of controlled vocabulary for subject description as an alternative. By using this standard and controlled set of vocabulary, every cataloger would describe material as uniformly as is possible in the real world, so that when users search for material in using that set of vocabulary, they may find as much relevant material as possible.

The LCSH, evolved out of a system first created in 1898 by the Library of Congress of the United States and still maintained by that library, is one such system of controlled vocabulary. They are, by now, “perhaps the most widely adopted subject indexing language in the world...translated into many languages, and...used around the world by libraries large and small” (Library of Congress 2015).

Although the LCSH must be controlled and standardized for the subject indexing to be effective and useful, the Library attempts to achieve the best possible alignment of LCSH to actual and current usage by acting on a principle of literary warrant—that is, by

trying to reflect the actual pattern of subjects represented by the [materials],” rather than trying to pre-determine subjects as some other systems of classification do (Lerner 1998:134). The process has been described thus:

Each day new books appear on [subject catalogers’] desks discussing new subjects—the discovery of a new insect, the development of a new tax, a new uprising in Arica—for which no subject heading yet exists. It is the cataloger’s duty to research the topic to determine the importance of the new subject, its scope, its validity, and its relationship to other subjects already established. Once the cataloger is convinced the subject is a genuine expansion of man’s experience, he determines the most appropriate words to be used in describing it and defends his recommended heading through various formal review procedures. If it is accepted, the heading eventually becomes a part of the...*Library of Congress Subject Heading List*.” (Goodrum 1974:95)

Therefore, as “language, meaning and connotations evolve,” the Library of Congress’s Policy and Standards Division (PSD) “changes or eliminates thousands of subject headings [in the LCSH] each year” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016). Some of these changes have major social significance, as when “[the] term ’Negro’...was retired as a subject heading in 1975 [or when] "insane" was abandoned in 2007 and replaced with ’mentally ill’” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016). Most of the changes are less noted, but nonetheless important—and, given the diversity of stakeholders, the Library of Congress attempts to make the process of change as public as possible.

The LCSH—along with other Library of Congress practices and services—have become such a dominant standard the libraries in the United States that the Library of Congress has built a cooperative structure, the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO), to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of the libraries that use them (Library of Congress n.d.-b.; see Goodrum 1974:219). Members of SACO, such as the

Dartmouth University libraries as we will see later, can request changes to LCSH, and the list of proposals, decisions and changes updated monthly, are publicly available (see Library of Congress 2015).

Unauthorized International Migration: U.S. Narratives

The LCSH have been drawn from existing narratives in the United States, and each LCSH term relating to unauthorized immigration can be correlated to a historical moment in the narratives surrounding immigration in the United States. **Aliens**, **Immigrants**, and **Illegal aliens** are all subject headings currently used in LCSH, with change having been internally approved for **Aliens** and **Illegal aliens** currently. The LCSH's scope notes help clarify the boundaries between terms. Thus, in LCSH, the subject heading **Aliens** refers to “persons who are not citizens of the country in which they reside.” (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016). It is distinguished from the subject heading **Immigrants**, which refers to “foreign-born persons who enter a country intending to become permanent residents or citizens,” reflecting U.S. legal demarcations. (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2007; Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute n.d.). There is no scope clarification for the subject heading **Illegal Aliens**. While the scope definitions for **Aliens** and **Immigrants** suggest that **Illegal Aliens** would refer to all persons who reside in a country not of their citizenship without authorization, irrespective of their intention about the future, but it seems to be used interchangeably with unauthorized international migration—and “illegal immigrants” is a recognized variant, that is to say, it is in an equivalence relationship to, to **Illegal Aliens**—rather than as a subcategory to it.

In this thesis, I am primarily concerned with the subject heading **Illegal Aliens**, but as it is a compound concept I will discuss each constituent part—*illegal*, and *alien*, products of distinct historical and intellectual currents in the United States—separately below.

Aliens.

Aliens is a much older subject heading than the compound **Illegal Aliens**, reflecting the particular discursive changes in the narratives in the United States. **Aliens** was already present as an entry in the first edition of *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogues of the Library of Congress*, published in parts between 1910 and 1914, which became the precursor to today's LCSH—and it has been in use continuously since then. It is noteworthy that the terminology of “aliens” was included despite having other common meanings “in dictionary definitions, including ‘beings from another planet,’” which goes against a principle of building controlled vocabularies (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016; see Chan 2007:220).

The term “aliens,” a legal term of art referring to resident persons of foreign origin, first appeared in the United States’ official language in 1790, but it traces its origins to English common law, and William Blackstone’s 1765 definition. From that tradition, the concept of “aliens” inherited a dimension of ‘allegiance’, which in the United States later developed into the concept of “enemy aliens.” Moreover, in the United States “aliens” became imbued with meanings of a racial hierarchy, as well as suggestions of economic competition. All these are elements of the conceptualization and reproduction of the term “aliens” in current political narratives.

Blackstone (1765) thought that “[the] first and most obvious division of the people is into aliens and natural-born subjects” (Blackstone 1765:354). The division was based on a conceptualization of “allegiance” which, he argued, had two types: “the first was a “natural and perpetual” allegiance to the ruler of one’s birth realm, due regardless of any change of circumstances; and the second, a local and temporary allegiance, “due from an alien...for so long a time as he continued within the king’s dominion and protection” (Blackstone 1765:357, 358).

This idea of a permanent allegiance due to the realm of one’s birth seemed to have been tempered by the time the first law was enacted in the United States defining citizenship. The *Naturalization Act* of 1790 noted that some aliens could become citizens by oath of allegiance (1 Stat. 103; Cohn 2015; Scobey-Thal 2014). However, among those immigrants those who did not opt or could not opt for citizenship, the idea of a natural permanent allegiance to one’s place of birth, and from it an inference of threat should the nation of origin come into conflict with the United States, evolved into the idea of an enemy alien during the Revolutionary Wars, as seen in the *Alien and Sedition Acts* of 1798. One of four Acts, the *Alien Enemies Act*, declares: “...all natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation or government, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be within the United States and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed, as alien enemies” (1 Stat. 570).

However, the idea of the permanence of allegiance tied to one’s origins returned, and was tied to *racial* origins, in the twentieth century. During World War II, the questioning of *aliens’* loyalties, and the idea of an “enemy in our midst,” was expanded

to *some* citizens, and even to *some* U.S.-born citizens, as shown by the massive internment of Japanese Americans but not of German Americans or Italian Americans. Thus, Blackstone's original idea of a permanent allegiance tied to one's birth had transformed into an idea of permanent allegiance tied to one's "race." Racial aspects in the construction of the idea of "aliens" will be further discussed in a separate section below. Most recently, the idea of *enemy alien* was used during the post-9/11 era again, adding an element of religious conceptualization as well.

A second meaning conveyed by the term "aliens" concerns "race." Race, slavery, and citizenship were related from the very beginning: the first law of the United States on citizenship, the *Naturalization Act* of 1790, restricted citizenship to "free white persons" (1 Stat. 103). The "free white" requirement was intended to maintain slavery and exclude the people in slavery, largely of African origin, from claims of citizenship. Only in 1870, after the Civil War, the right to citizenship was extended to "those of African origin" (Cohn 2015).

Additional meanings of essential, race-based difference and hierarchies emerged in the era of the great migrations in the later decades of the nineteenth century. When Chinese contract workers started appearing in California agriculture, after the railroad was completed in 1869, the reaction was furious (Portes and Rumbaut 2014:11, 12). Discourse at this time often stressed that "the Chinese were a distinct race with a biologically determined nature that was reflected in moral behavior, cultural preferences, and physiological traits" (Calavita 2000:11; Portes and Rumbaut 2014:12). These sentiments culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which ended Chinese labor immigration. Senator Farley extolled in Senates debates on the bill:

The Mongolian race are not of our household; they are not of our people...the Mongolian race has a civilization wholly and essentially distinct...**Mongolians are alien to our civilization, aliens in blood, aliens in faith**, and clogs to the free movement of the wheels of Christian civilization and enlightened progress...” (Calavita 2000:11; U.S. Congress. Senate 1882: 1583; my emphasis)

This emphasis of difference, imbued with ascribed racial meanings, persisted—and southern and eastern Europeans also became subject to such treatment a few decades later. Amidst a discourse “dominated by the social Darwinist evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer and the ‘science’ of eugenics, the intellectual and moral inferiority of southern and eastern Europeans was taken for granted and their capacity for eventual assimilation into American culture widely questioned” (Portes and Rumbaut 2014:9).

Moreover, *aliens* are often conceptualized as economic competitors by those who occupy similar positions in the labor market. In the East Coast, there were union mobilizations against immigrant workers, until, eventually, “...northeastern industrialists tapped the large black labor reserves in the former Confederacy...” (Portes and Rumbaut 2014:13). In the West, both Chinese laborers and the Japanese workers who attempted to work in the farms faced mobilizations against them, and were pushed to move out of farms and into cities (Portes and Rumbaut 2014:12–13). Agricultural labor demands in the American West eventually turned to Mexico as a source of labor, with strict demands that the migrations be temporary or seasonal. This was the *bracero* program, which coincided with a rise in the idea of the “illegality” of immigration—but that subject will be treated in the next section.

In sum, “alien” ultimately became constructed as a being who was essentially different and inferior, who was ultimately inassimilable, and who was even dangerous—directly threatening due to opposed loyalties or by carrying such qualities that could

“corrupt” the host society. In a political and economic environment in which immigration increasingly became perceived as more troublesome than helpful (given a slowing industrialization process, the radical activist tendencies of some immigrants who became the backbone of a union movement, and a new ability to recruit an alternative cheap labor force, African Americans from the South), such rhetoric was used to propel increasingly restrictive legislation (Portes and Rumbaut 2014:9-10). These restrictive movements culminated in the 1924 *National Origins Act*, inaugurating the period of immigration restriction in the United States. It is in this period that the notion of “illegality” of immigration is thought to have initiated.

Illegality.

The concept of *illegality*, as associated with international migration into the United States, is thought to have emerged during the period of immigration restriction, which is considered to have stretched from the 1924 *National Origins Act* to the *Hart-Cellar Act* of 1965 (Ngai 2004). A number of factors combined to give rise to bring the idea of *legality/illegality* into the public consciousness: the restrictive 1924 *National Origins Act*, the emergence of the idea of the “borders” as a space in which the national territorial integrity should be defended, the continuing need for agricultural laborers in California and other states, which were fulfilled with programs for temporary migration from Mexico in contrast to the highly restrictive immigration climate elsewhere.

Despite these origins of the concept of illegality, the subject heading **Illegal alien** was not introduced until much later. The heading **Alien, Illegal** was established in 1980, and it was revised to its current form, **Illegal aliens**, in 1993 (Library of Congress, Policy

and Standards Division 2016). It must be remembered at this point that *LCSH* terms are adopted on a principle of *literary warrant*:

As with all LC subject headings, **Illegal aliens** was based on literary warrant: it was needed to describe the topics being covered in published literature, and it employed the terminology used in the literature and in reference sources. The literature addressed the legal status of persons who entered and lived in a country illegally, the social conditions under which those persons lived, and the services provided to them, including education, health, and employment, among other topics. (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016)

As a result, the specific phrase “illegal aliens” may have become of widespread adoption only in the following immigration period inaugurated with the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which increased numerical limits on immigration, opened immigration to entrants from Asia and Africa (continuing a process begun in 1952’s amendments), but for the first time in U.S. history placed a limit in immigration from the Western Hemisphere—the Americas. In particular, with the *bracero*, or U.S.-Mexico temporary agricultural labor migration programs having been terminated a few years prior, this effectively meant a sudden legal restriction upon the long-standing migratory movement between the United States and Mexico. Thus, when large-scale immigration resumed in the 1970s, flows included both authorized and unauthorized immigration, and Mexico in particular became the largest source country of both types of migration into the United States (Hipsman and Meissner 2013). With the growing visibility of unauthorized migration, debates around the issue grew—with the first law attempting to address and rectify the situation with unauthorized immigrants being enacted in 1986 (Immigration Reform and Control Act), and I would argue, the phrase “illegal alien” became fully established in the immigration narratives of the United States.

PRODUCING CHANGE: CAMPAIGNS AND RESPONSES

Campaigns for Change

In the 2010s, President Obama's immigration reform plans, and then the 2016 presidential elections, have stirred strong political mobilization, and an intense discursive contest, over unauthorized immigration. Otto Santa Ana, a linguist and professor of Chicana/o studies who studies the representation of Latinos in U.S. narratives⁶, observed: "the current vocabulary used to describe immigrants is polarizing, with politicians on the right preferring 'illegal' and those on the left opting for undocumented" (quoted in Gambino 2015). Merolla, Ramakrishnan, and Haynes (2013) further explain: on the immigration reform advocacy end of the spectrum, the term "undocumented" is preferred over the modifier "illegal," which is taken to represent a framework that tilts "policy debates in favor of immigration enforcement and restriction" away from comprehensive solutions and an understanding of operating racial and ethnocentric prejudices (793). On the opposing end of the spectrum, it is argued that "illegal immigrant" is an accurate depiction of entry or presence in the United States without the sanction of law; this position is reflected in the slogan "'What part of illegal don't you understand?'" (Merolla et al. 2013:793). Finally, the authors observe, "many demographers, research organizations, and federal government agencies have chosen to use the term 'unauthorized immigrants,'" noting that neither "illegal" nor "undocumented" are entirely accurate (Merolla et al. 2013:793-4). Santa Ana agrees, observing that the adjective "unauthorized" describes a given person's immigration, "[underscoring] that they should not be here without highlighting criminality" (quoted in Gambino 2015).

⁶ See, *e.g.*, Santa Ana 2002, 2012.

Though no choice is free of framing or connotations, in this thesis I will use “unauthorized immigration” or “unauthorized immigrants” to refer to the phenomenon or to the persons that are the subject of this discursive contest.⁷

As late as 2012, there were indications that “illegal” was a standard modifier used in describing unauthorized immigrants. Merolla et al. (2013) studied major news media across the political spectrum between 2007 and 2011, and found that while conservative news outlets tended to focus even general discussions of immigration around unauthorized immigration, all news organizations had referred to unauthorized immigration as “illegal” immigration most frequently during that time (794). A Pew Research Center study of articles from LexisNexis agreed that “illegal immigrant” was the predominant phrase that referred to undocumented migrants (Guskin 2013). On another front, and as seen in the section above, in library subject cataloging the subject heading **Aliens** has been in continuous use since the first edition of *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogues of the Library of Congress* dating to 1910-1914, while **Illegal aliens** was established in 1980 (as **Alien, illegal**, then changed to the current form in 1993).

The current wave of criticism towards the “illegal” characterization points out that it is not an accurate description: simply being in the United States without proper documentation is a civil, not a criminal, matter, and before the 1986 Immigration and Control Act, unauthorized immigrants could be legally hired (Vargas 2012; Merolla et al. 2013:794). Secondly, it is a politicizing term, reducing a person to his or her immigration

⁷ Another site of discursive construction is process of reification of a group and social category around this issue.

infraction, as is rarely done with other types of rule-breaking: “We don’t call pedestrians who cross in the middle of the road illegal pedestrians,’ and, ‘[a] kid who skips school to go to Disneyland is not an illegal student” (Santa Ana quoted in Gambino 2015). The effect is criminalizing, marginalizing, and even dehumanizing, critics argue (Vargas 2012; Sullivan 2012b; Jamieson 2012; Race Forward n.d.-a, n.d.-c).

The nuances seem to be well understood across the political spectrum, especially for “illegal aliens,” “illegals,” and “aliens.” In 2005, a memo by conservative political strategist Frank Luntz indicated that “illegals” sounded “harsh and spiky...it’s a way to write off a group and justify its mistreatment,” and it would be strategically foolish to use it: “if you used the word ‘illegals’, you didn’t get a chance to say anything else—Latino audiences would turn you off” (quoted in Bazelon 2015). By 2012, *The New York Times* stylebook was characterizing “illegal alien” as “sinister-sounding,” and its appearance in the news media had dropped to its lowest point in 2013, according to a Pew Research Center study (Sullivan 2012b; Guskin 2013). In 2015, California passed a law to delete the term “alien” from the state labor code, and U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) introduced a bill to remove “alien” from federal laws and documentation, with a bill called the Correcting Hurtful and Alienating Names in Government Expression [CHANGE] Act (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015; Office of U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro 2015). In the judicial branch, the U.S. Supreme Court majority opinion for *Mohawk Industries v. Carpenter*, decided in 2009 (558 U.S. 100), used the phrase “undocumented immigrant” rather than “illegal alien.”⁸ Justice Sonia

⁸ See Rodriguez (2014) for a discussion on its significance.

Sotomayor, who wrote the opinion, explained her choice in a lecture at Yale Law School in 2014:

To dub every immigrant a criminal because they're undocumented, to call them "*illegal* aliens," seemed, and has seemed, insulting to me... they're human beings with a serious legal problem, but the word "illegal" alien made them sound like those other kinds of criminals. And I think people then paint those individuals as something less than worthy human beings. And it changes the conversation when you recognize that this is a different—it's a regulatory problem. We've criminalized a lot of it, but it started as, and fundamentally remains, a regulatory problem, not a criminal one. And so that's why I chose my words. (Sotomayor and Greenhouse)

As a result, when the terms "illegal aliens," "illegals," or "aliens" appear, such as in the 2012 Mitt Romney campaign or the currently ongoing 2016 Donald Trump campaign, they are understood as clear statements of political stance (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015).

On the other hand, contests over the meaning of "illegal immigrants," a long-dominant term, continue. Luntz's recommendation in his 2005 memo had been to use "illegal immigrants" instead of "illegals" (Bazelon 2015). However, immigration reform activists and campaigns are advocating for the abandonment of any use of "illegal" in association with immigrants (Vargas 2012; Sullivan 2012b; Jamieson 2012; Race Forward n.d.-a, n.d.-b.).

In 2010, "The Applied Research Center, now known as Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation, launched the 'Drop the I-Word' campaign, urging media outlets and the general public to stop describing immigrants as 'illegal'" (Scobey-Thal 2014). Signs arguing that 'No human being is illegal' have been used in immigration-related demonstrations (Gambino 2015). José Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and immigration activist, has been instrumental in pressuring the

news media, and has organized a campaign called #WordsMatter to persuade the 2016 presidential candidates to drop the phrase ‘illegal immigrants’ (Sullivan 2012a; Gambino 2015).

News Media Organizations

José Antonio Vargas has played a key role in pressuring and galvanizing media organizations to “stop using the term ‘illegal immigrants’” (Sullivan 2012a). The “Drop the I-Word” campaign also focuses primarily on the news media (Race Forward n.d.-b, n.d.-c). These pressures, along with public demonstrations and signature campaigns, have been quite successful and many news media outlets have agreed to drop the use of “illegal” when referring to immigrants. The *Miami Herald* and the *Huffington Post* had already stopped using “illegal immigrant,” in 2003 and 2008 respectively; following Vargas’s and “Drop the I-Word” campaigns, NBC News, and ABC News dropped the use of “illegal immigrants,” followed by the Associated Press (Vargas 2012; Bazelon 2015). The influential Associated Press (AP) declaration in April 2013 stated that AP would no longer use “illegal alien” or “illegal immigrant,” because “‘illegal’ should describe only an action,” not a person. (Scobey-Thal 2014). Since then, *The Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, and *The Los Angeles Times* have followed suit (Scobey-Thal 2014). *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CBS News, and *The Wall Street Journal* have not banned the term “illegal immigrant” outright, but have declared that they would encourage the use of alternatives (Bazelon 2015).

The New York Times’ response to activist pressures is well documented through editor blog posts and articles in the newspaper and its magazine, and illuminates how the change may occur in a high profile, influential media organization. Until April 2013, *The*

New York Times' stylebook had stated: "**illegal immigrant** is the preferred term, rather than the sinister-sounding illegal alien. Do not use the euphemism undocumented" (Sullivan 2012b). News organizations stylebooks, while not completely analogous to libraries' controlled vocabulary systems for subject indexing (such as the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*), nevertheless are somewhat parallel in that they do somewhat control terminology, being "the definitive guide to usage, relied upon by writers and editors, for the purpose of consistency" (Sullivan 2013).

When José Antonio Vargas contacted *The New York Times* to lobby for a change on their policy to stop using the term "illegal immigrant," the *Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan started posting a series of blog posts on the issue, reporting views of editors and reporters, and inviting public comment (Sullivan 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Though Sullivan did not have deciding authority on the issue, she concluded that series of posts with the opinion that **illegal immigrant** should be retained, writing that suggested alternatives did not match it in clarity or accuracy. By April 2013, however, in the aftermath of the Associated Press decision to abandon the user of the term, Sullivan noted that she had changed her position: "So many people find it offensive to refer to a person with an adjective like 'illegal' that I now favor the use of 'undocumented' or 'unauthorized' as alternatives" (Sullivan 2013).

While internal debates were occurring, activists "staged a protest in front of *The New York Times* headquarters and delivered more than 70,000 signatures to Jill Abramson, the executive editor of The Times, asking her to end the use of the phrase" (Haughney 2013). The *Times* announced their editorial decision on April 23, 2013, declaring that **illegal immigrant**, while it would continue to be allowed, would no longer

be the preferred term—and that reporters and editors would be encouraged to consider alternatives to explain the specific circumstances or actions (Haughney 2013). Phillip B. Corbett, the *Times*' associate managing editor for standards who oversees the *Times* stylebook, further explained the editorial position at that time: “Unauthorized is also an acceptable description, though it has a bureaucratic tone... ‘Undocumented’ is the term preferred by many immigrants and their advocates, but it has a flavor of euphemism and should be approached with caution outside quotations,” and “Advocates on one side of this political debate have called on news organizations to use only the terms they prefer... [but] we have to make those decisions for journalistic reasons alone, based on what we think best informs our readers on this important topic... It’s not our job to take sides” (quoted in Haughney 2013). At the time, Vargas reacted thus: “*The New York Times* can’t have it both ways... But at the end of the day... I am for reporters... to be as descriptive and contextual as possible” (quoted in Haughney 2013). Both Corbett’s and Vargas’ points—on neutrality and contextualization—are relevant to the discussion on the Library of Congress’s struggles in parallel circumstances below.

Two years later, *The New York Times* ran an editorial arguing for the abandonment of another term--“alien” to denote a noncitizen. The *Times* editorial board argued: “Semantics may seem like a trivial part of immigration reform, but words, and their evolution, matter greatly in fraught policy debates” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015). Nonetheless, they recognized that ultimately “it will be up to Congress to recognize that there is no compelling reason to keep a hostile term in the law that sets out how immigrants are welcomed into the country” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015).

Real change in the language appearing in the news media seems to have accompanied these official position changes and statements. According to the Pew Research Center's report, from June 2013, use of the phrase "illegal aliens" in news articles had significantly declined in 2013 in comparison with 2007 and previous years (Guskin 2013). Moreover, and though "illegal immigrant" remained the predominant phrase to refer to undocumented migrants, the use of "illegal" in association with "aliens," "immigrants," "workers," or "migrants" was generally declining (Guskin 2013). "Undocumented" and "unauthorized" were newly introduced phrases (Guskin 2013). The Pew report did not breakdown the results by individual news organizations.

To provide an update on changes since 2013, I designed a simple followup study, in which I searched for how frequently certain phrases describing immigrants ("illegal alien," "illegal immigrant," "unauthorized immigrant," "undocumented," and plurals) appeared in the full text of articles treating immigration as a subject and published in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* between 2010-2015. The full explanation of the study design appears in the Methodology section earlier in this thesis. The results are shown in the graphs and tables below:

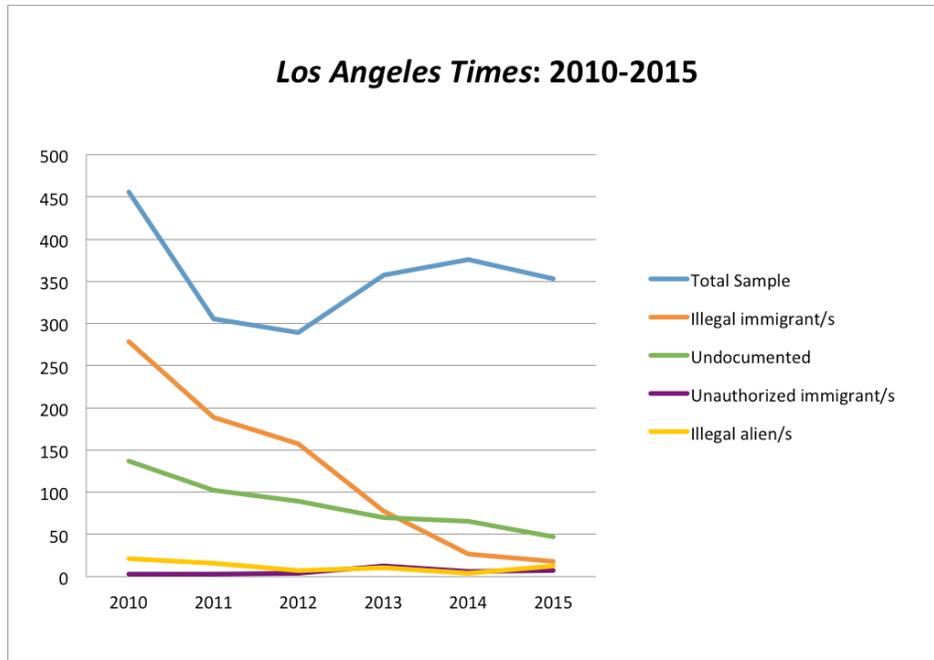


Figure 1. Phrases describing immigrants: *The Los Angeles Times*, 2010-2015

Source: ProQuest National Newspapers Premier: *Los Angeles Times* (covering 1985-Present).

Table 1. Frequency of phrases describing immigrants: *The Los Angeles Times*, 2010-2015

Year	Total Sample*	Total Phrase Use	illegal immigrant/s	undocumented	unauthorized immigrant/s	illegal alien/s
2010	456	440	279	137	3	21
2011	306	310	189	102	3	16
2012	289	257	157	89	4	7
2013	357	170	77	70	13	10
2014	376	103	27	66	6	4
2015	353	85	18	47	7	13
Total	2137	1365	747	511	36	71

*Note: Sample is defined by using only articles indexed with either of two database-provided subject headings: “aliens” or “immigration policy.”

Source: ProQuest National Newspapers Premier: *Los Angeles Times* (covering 1985-Present).

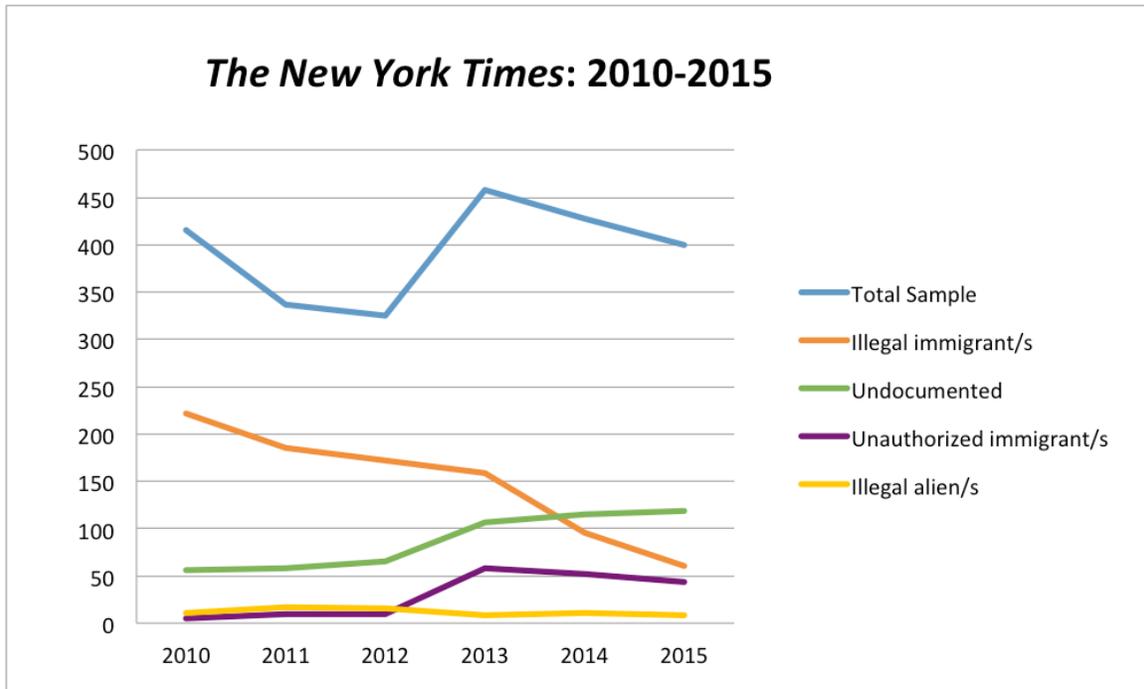


Figure 2. Phrases describing immigrants: *The New York Times*, 2010-2015

Source: *ProQuest: The New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)* (covering 1980-Present).

Table 2. Frequency of phrases describing immigrants: *The New York Times*, 2010-2015

Year	Total Sample*	Total Phrase Use	illegal immigrant/s	undocumented	unauthorized immigrant/s	illegal alien/s
2010	416	293	221	56	5	11
2011	337	269	185	58	9	17
2012	325	263	172	65	10	16
2013	458	332	159	107	58	8
2014	427	273	95	115	52	11
2015	400	230	60	119	43	8
Total	2363	1660	892	520	177	71

*Note: Sample is defined by using only articles indexed with either of two database-provided subject headings: “aliens” or “immigration policy.”

Source: *ProQuest: The New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)* (covering 1980-Present).

The results suggest that change has indeed occurred, and it has been quicker and more dramatic at *The Los Angeles Times* than at *The New York Times*. Specifically, the following can be observed:

1. At *The Los Angeles Times*, the use of any of these four phrases, combined, has significantly declined over time. This may suggest an effort to describe specific circumstances, and to contextualize, rather than using ready-made phrases and labels. There is also a reduction at *The New York Times*, but it is more attenuated.
2. The frequency of “illegal immigrant” (and plural) has been dramatically reduced at both news organizations, with *The Los Angeles Times* showing a quicker change than *The New York Times*. This is consistent with their official positions.
3. “Undocumented” has replaced “illegal immigrant” as the most frequently appearing term in both publications. The change is more significant at *The New York Times*, where its use has increased since 2012-2013 to overtake the use of “illegal immigrant,” while at *The Los Angeles Times*, this label has experienced a decline—just at a slower rate than “illegal immigrant.”
4. Neither “unauthorized immigrant” nor “illegal alien” appear in significant frequencies from either organization.

Therefore, I can conclude that the recent activism and mobilization to change how unauthorized immigrants are labeled in the media seems to have been successful, as there is a correlation with a change on the discursive practices of these two influential news outlets in the direction of the activist demands.

The Library of Congress and Stakeholders

When Melissa Padilla noticed the term “illegal aliens” in library catalogs and initiated the challenge along with the student group Coalition for Immigration Reform, Equality, and DREAMers (CoFIRED), the Library of Congress Subject Headings (*LCSH*) followed the news media as a site of contest on immigration discourse. By that time, “illegal aliens” had largely fallen into disuse in the news media outside of quotations, having become widely understood as having a pejorative connotation (see, *e.g.*, Sullivan 2012b; Bazelon 2015; Guskin 2013; Sotomayor and Greenhouse 2014). The term did remain in the books in federal documentation and was invoked in the political speech of some presidential candidates (House Report No. 114-594; *The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015). The challenge to update the heading **Illegal aliens** in LCSH, and the unprecedented political interventions, highlight the pressures acting upon the LCSH’s administrator, the Library of Congress, and the tensions between its institutional position and the constituencies it currently serves.

After noticing the term “illegal aliens” as a subject descriptor, Melissa Padilla, jointly with the student organization CoFIRED, brought the issue to Dartmouth librarians. The librarians met with the students, and explained that the LCSH were part of a standard system, administered by the Library of Congress, but noted that they could propose a change, the Dartmouth libraries being a member of the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO), and offered to help submit the request after preparing a proposal with the students’ help (Peet 2016:12).

In summer of 2014, the Dartmouth librarian for cataloging and metadata services, John DeSantis, submitted a request to change the subject heading **Illegal aliens**,

proposing “undocumented immigrants” as an alternative (Peet 2016:12). After considering the request internally, the Library of Congress’s Policy and Standards Division, which administers the *LCSH*, released a public memo in February of 2015. In it, it noted that the change would be declined, because “illegal alien” was an established legal term, and because “undocumented immigrants” was not directly synonymous to “illegal aliens”; it promised to study the issue further, however (Peet 2016:12; Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016).

Reading the memo, Tina Gross, a librarian at St. Cloud State University, brought the issue to various bodies of the librarians’ professional organization, the American Library Association (ALA), which is a key constituency for the Library of Congress (Peet 2016:12; see Goodrum 1974:219). The ALA Council passed a resolution asking the Library of Congress to reconsider its decision, pointing out that the term “illegal aliens,” having become pejorative and increasingly nativist and racist in connotation, went against the core values of librarianship to provide unbiased service and to promote access to library and information resources to everyone (Peet 2016:12; American Library Association Council 2016).

The Library of Congress responded by calling a stakeholders’ meeting in February of 2016, in which the issue was debated and it was decided to replace **Aliens** with **Noncitizens**, and **Illegal aliens** with **Unauthorized immigration** (Peet 2016:12; Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016). The formal memo that the Library released announcing the change, in March 22nd, 2016, reflects its awareness of its delicate position, needing to negotiate scrutiny from various constituents:

As with all LC subject headings, **Illegal aliens** was based on literary warrant: it was needed to describe the topics being covered in published literature, and it

employed the terminology used in the literature and in reference sources. The literature addressed the legal status of persons who entered and lived in a country illegally, the social conditions under which those persons lived, and the services provided to them, including education, health, and employment, among other topics. (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016)

One can view the inclusion of this statement as a justification of its previous position to the challengers, and to the ALA, emphasizing that the term arose organically due to the increased appearance of the term in published literature, and that the material covered under the subject heading included positive content meant to protect and serve this population, however they may be named. This justification to the advocates for change is balanced with a counterbalancing justification to their potential opponents:

The phrase *illegal aliens* has taken on a pejorative tone in recent years, and in response, some institutions have determined that they will cease to use it. For example, in April 2014 the Associated Press announced that *illegal* would not be used as a descriptor for any individual.” (Library of Congress, Policy and Standards Division 2016)

Despite this sensitivity to their position and the heightened tensions around immigration issues, the Library of Congress faced backlash. Lamar Smith and John A. Culberson, members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Jeff Sessions and Ted Cruz, U.S. Senators, authored a letter to the Acting Librarian of Congress objecting to the change in strong terms:

There is no other way to put this: the Library has bowed to the political pressure of the moment. Such an action is beneath the dignity of the Library of Congress... Although we respect the Library’s independence to make decisions involving routine operations, Congress is fundamentally an oversight body, and we strongly object to the Library’s elimination of terms that Congress has exercised its authority to use and deploy in the United Code. These are statutory legal terms of art, not throwaway words to be arbitrarily erased. If individuals or organizations want to revise terms in current law, they should petition Congress to consider appropriate legislation.” (Smith et al. 2016)

Despite the suggestion, the proposed changes to LCSH did not amount to an attempt to

revise terms in the law, and there had never been a formal requirement previously that LCSH be aligned to terminology as used in U.S. law, though the administering bodies have customarily taken legal use into consideration as a weighing factor. The main operating principle for LCSH is “literary warrant”—use in available published literature in general, not just formal legal sources—to reflect current usages.

However, the next opposing step, the introduction of language in the 2017 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, funding the library of Congress, to require the Library to retain LCSH terminology used in federal law, could change that (Aguilera 2016). The attempt to prevent that step, by adding an amendment to allow the subject heading changes to stand, was led by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D- FL) and supported by the Hispanic, Black, and Asian Pacific American Caucuses of Congress but was narrowly defeated. (Peet 2016:12). Thus, the House Appropriations Bill that would fund the Library of Congress contains language requiring it to maintain the subject heading **Illegal aliens**, as a reflection of federal legal terminology. Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) wrote a dissenting statement in a report for the House Appropriations bill:

This bill wades unnecessarily into the Nation’s immigration debate by including report language that seeks to influence the Library of Congress to continue to use the term “Illegal alien” in its subject headings. Subject headings serve as the mechanism for how the Library catalogs or groups information—something the Library of Congress is well positioned to understand. They use headings that reflect current day uses of words and phrases so information is easily accessible by its users...Four Republicans joined with the Democrats to strip this language from the report. While the amendment did not pass, it showed there is bipartisan support to reduce the political rhetoric surrounding immigration and to allow the Library of Congress to remain free of political influence. (House Report No. 114-594).

On the other hand, the Senate version of the Appropriations bill contains no specification on subject headings, so it remains to be seen how the bills will be reconciled (*The New York Times* Editorial Board 2016). Given that the requirement to keep federal legal language in LCSH is not yet law, the Library of Congress's decision currently stands, but the U.S. House of Representatives challenge may have a chilling effect on the administrative impulse to implement the change (Peet 2016:12). In the meantime, the American Library Association, which had written to both the House and Senate Appropriations committees, has pledged to continue advocating for the subject heading change, and Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) has introduced a separate bill in the U.S. House of Representatives to remove the term "alien" from federal laws and documentation, called the Correcting Hurtful and Alienating Names in Government Expression [CHANGE] Act (Feldman and Medeiros 2016a, 2016b; American Library Association 2016; *The New York Times* Editorial Board 2015; Office of U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro 2015).

The exceptional challenge over the subject heading **Illegal aliens** has served to highlight the fundamental tension between the organizational dependence of the Library of Congress on the U.S. Congress and the wide variety of audiences and constituencies it has developed. The Library of Congress, the library that administers the *LCSH*, was not created to be a regulating body or even a national library. Instead, the Library of Congress was founded in 1800, strictly to serve as "a working collection for legislators" in the U.S. Congress, and thus it has always been entirely funded by it (Lerner 1998:118). As a result, the Library is ultimately beholden to the U.S. Congress, and the Appropriations committees in the House of Representatives and in the Senate hold power over the Library: "They rarely say, 'We want you to do this, we don't want you to do

that,” but they either provide money to staff and activity or they do not. These signals from the appropriation committees—plus tradition, protocol, and common sense—provide the Librarian with his instructions” (Goodrum and Dalrymple 1982:220). Nor are the Appropriations committees the only bodies interested in the Library in the U.S. Congress. The Joint Committee on the Library often acts as an advisor and mediator between the Library and the Appropriations committees, the Committee on House Administration and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration have the power to potentially “modify the long-term objectives of the Library by changing the Library’s statutory charter” (Goodrum and Dalrymple 1982:224). In consequence, the “nonpartisanship” of the Library of Congress from the point of view of the U.S. Congress legislators has always closely scrutinized since early days, as is evident from President Andrew Jackson making the third Librarian of Congress, James Watterston, resign in 1829 for “too overt a commitment to the Whig party (Goodrum and Dalrymple 1982:16).

Over time, however, while toeing the line to appear “nonpartisan” to legislators, the Library of Congress has seen its role—and the variety of its constituents—expand far beyond the initial vision. These expansions included securing copyright deposits, Smithsonian exchanges, foreign exchanges and more to create a massive collection for what is today the largest library in the world—holding more than 162 million items; opening up the library for access to the general public; establishing a widely adopted classification system; supplying the bulk of cataloging records for U.S. published materials to many libraries in the U.S. and the world; and constructing the three Library of Congress buildings (Goodrum and Dalrymple 1982; Library of Congress n.d.-a).

One of these expansions was the placement of the responsibility for the most influential subject indexing system for library catalogs on the shoulders of the Library of Congress. The adoption of *LCSH* as the *de facto* standard for subject indexing in U.S. libraries was not premeditated. Instead, it arose organically over time: “No statute compels American libraries to follow [the Library of Congress’s] lead in collection development, cataloging, or preservation of materials; but economics and sheer common sense have induced many libraries to take their direction in these matters from the Library of Congress” (Lerner 1998:120). Even outside the United States, the *LCSH* system “has been adopted by national and university libraries worldwide, sometimes with locally produced modifications to cover in detail those aspects of national life not completely understood in Washington.” (Lerner 1998:134). This has meant efficiency, and doubly so: the information seeker is able to search for relevant information quicker, and for libraries it is time- and cost-efficient (Olson 2001:640).

Librarians, represented by the professional organization the American Library Association (ALA), are another key constituency for the Library of Congress. As seen before, the wide adoption of the Library of Congress’s practices and services has meant that a close cooperation between the Library of Congress and “the nation’s libraries (usually represented by the American Library Association)” has become indispensable, “to be certain that [Library of Congress’s] procedures are efficient, constructive, and compatible with the needs, procedures, and audiences for the dozens of different kinds of library institutions in the United States” (Goodrum 1974:219). The present case has shown the close cooperative relationship between librarians and the Library of Congress, through the various committee works and ALA actions. Though the Library of Congress

produces many of the services and products, such as LCSH, it is the ALA, the professional body representing the library and information sciences profession, that codifies professional standards and principles, as well as core values—such as access (“All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library...should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users”), democracy (“The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves”), and social responsibility (“The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of (...) and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service...”) that have been relevant to this case (American Library Association Council 2004). In addition to the ALA, there are several library organizations focused on working with immigrant and minority communities, such as the National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking (REFORMA), and the Joint Council of Librarians of Color.

In sum, the Library of Congress is structurally dependent on the U.S. Congress, and this structure is at odds with the nature and variety of the audience the Library serves, placing the Library in a difficult position. Though news media organizations are also beholden to a variety of constituents (boards of directors, consumers, stockholders, and more), this present case has shown that the Library of Congress’ organizational position as part of the Legislative Branch means that it can be under even greater scrutiny and restraint. For these and other reasons, it may be that, as Hjørland (2012) argues, “the development of quality classification systems or [knowledge organization] tools is much too big a job for a single library,” and a “large-scale international cooperation involving

LIS [Library and Information Science] practitioners, LIS researchers, and (other kinds of) specialists, including subject specialists in all major fields” may be an alternative (302).

Though it’s unclear that such an international body would necessarily do better at negotiating conflicting interests, the mismatch between the Library’s origins and source of funding on the one hand, and the diversity of constituents it has come to serve, each with different and conflicting needs, has compromised the Library of Congress’s ability to change. Even in 1974, Goodrum was observing, “[for] the past hundred years, one of the standard dialogues at library conventions has started with the question: Why is it so hard to get LC to do something new?” (233–34).

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADINGS: CONSTRUCTING NORMATIVE MEANINGS

Next, I will describe the LCSH as a linguistic tool for information retrieval, and how it produces and reproduces discourse, legitimizing certain terms over others in its context of use. In particular, I will discuss how the LCSH entry **Illegal aliens** reinforces the normativity of the idea of “illegal aliens” over other possible conceptions of unauthorized international migration. There are two distinct ways in which LCSH become discursive acts in use. First, the visible presence of LCSH in library catalogs as standard terms constitutes a discursive act that legitimizes the chosen terms. Secondly, the LCSH reinforce normativity by rewarding searches using standard terminology (and recognized variants) with more effective search results than when users search with terminology that is unrecognized.

Word Choices

One of the important ways in which the LCSH legitimize “illegal aliens” is by presenting it as the subject for any library materials dealing with unauthorized immigration. Many library catalogs display, in their records of materials, a metadata category called “Subjects” or equivalent, in which they list the corresponding Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as clickable links to direct users to other records in the same subject heading. As an example, this is a Worldcat record for a book grouped under the subject heading **Illegal aliens**:



The screenshot shows a WorldCat record for the book "Impossible subjects: illegal aliens and the making of modern America" by Mae M. Ngai. The record includes the following information:

- Author:** Mae M. Ngai
- Publisher:** Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Series:** Politics and society in twentieth-century America.
- Edition/Format:** Print book : English : New paperback edition / with a new forward by the author [View all editions and formats](#)
- Database:** WorldCat
- Summary:** This book traces the origins of the "illegal alien" in American law and society, explaining why and how illegal migration became the central problem in U.S. immigration policy—a process that profoundly shaped ideas and practices about citizenship, race, and state authority in the twentieth century. Mae Ngai offers a close reading of the legal regime of restriction that commenced in the 1920s—its statutory [Read more...](#)
- Rating:** ☆☆☆☆ (not yet rated) [0 with reviews - Be the first.](#)
- Subjects:** [Illegal aliens -- United States -- History.](#)
[Emigration and immigration law -- United States -- History.](#)
[Citizenship -- United States -- History.](#)
[View all subjects](#)
- More like this:** [Similar Items](#)

Fig. 3: Sample catalog record with subject headings.

While users can thus be directed to other resources that may be helpful to their search, the presence of subject headings also transmits the idea that the material in question has a given subject, and that the subject is properly described by the subject heading shown. It is possible, moreover, that library catalogs may appear to readers as authoritative and objective, and that subject descriptions may be interpreted as the (only)

“correct” or “legitimate” descriptions. Therefore, their presence in library catalogs is a discursive act that reinforces the subject heading terminology as normative.

Subject indexing is performed to connect information seekers with materials that discuss the topics of their interest. The core task of subject indexing consists of establishing semantic relationships between concepts, and it inherently involves synthesis, judgment, inclusion or exclusion, and naming (see Hjørland 2012:306). Subject catalogers, much like journalists, have always faced the “neutrality” conundrum (see, e.g., Corbett quoted in Haughney 2013 on journalistic neutrality). The Library of Congress, in its *Subject Headings Manual* for catalogers, stresses the importance of neutrality: “Individual cataloger knowledge and judgment inevitably play a role in assessing what is significant in a work’s contents, but headings should not be assigned that reflect a cataloger’s opinion about the contents. Consider the intent of the author or publisher and, if possible, assign headings for this orientation without being judgmental” (Library of Congress. Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate 2016: H 0180, 7).

Though it is certainly important for catalogers to do the best they can to represent the materials as intended by their creators, as best as they can tell, many researchers in the Library and Information Science field have recognized that subject classification, and indexing, are interpretive acts (Hjørland 2012:308). After all, subject cataloging involves naming categories of knowledge, and “[in] a language replete with synonyms, which of several equally plausible terms should be chosen to express a concept? (...) Should a book treating of several subjects be listed under all of them, or only under one, and, if the latter, how was that one topic to be chosen?” (Lerner 1998:193).

Controlled vocabularies exist precisely because each word in human language does not correspond exactly and solely to clearly and exclusively defined concepts, but this means, in turn, that choices made to build controlled vocabularies are arbitrary and contingent choices. In addition to being arbitrary, choices may be ambiguous. Though a recognized principle of controlled vocabulary building is to “avoid using multiple terms that have the same meaning as valid headings” and to “avoid headings that have more than one meaning,” ambiguous choices may not always be avoided, either by mistake or due to the nature of language. (Chan 2007:220). For example, the use of **Aliens** as a subject heading to denote ‘persons of foreign origin’ is ambiguous, as the word “aliens” in the larger social context can also refer to ‘extraterrestrial beings’. For this reason, qualifiers and scope notes are used in LCSH to provide context and clarify meanings (Chan 2007:220). In the case of **Aliens**, the subject heading carries the scope note “Here are entered works on persons who are not citizens of the country in which they reside” (Library of Congress 2016).

Finally, choices are not simply random, and reflect perspectives and worldviews: “selections of concepts and their selected semantic relations from a specific conceptualization...Ontologies are not just neutral reflections of an objective reality, but are constructed from a world-view that is fruitful for some purposes and values, though at the expense of others” (Hjørland 2012:312). Choices are drawn from available narratives in the larger social context. For example, in early Christian and Muslim libraries, “books were arranged according to their relationship to the word of God” (Lerner 1998:132). In the case of the LCSH, which operate on the principle of literary warrant, choices are drawn both from the narratives available in the cataloged publications themselves, which

in turn draw from the social world, with each work reflecting “the subjectivity of both its author and its time” (Hjørland 2012:309). Even so, it is difficult to keep up, and despite the Library of Congress efforts in updating LCSH, described in an earlier section, correspondence to published literature lags. In particular, as Hjørland (2012) finds, minority views are particularly poorly represented in LCSH terminology, though he concludes that majority views are not well represented either (Hjørland 2012:308).

Immigration activist Vargas (2012) has pointed out that “[in] an increasingly diverse society...language belongs to the people whose stories are being told, whose distinct realities need to be accurately and fairly represented to the benefit of everyone” (Vargas 2012). Poor representation is an important issue, because, indexing is to represent, and to represent is a discursive act: choices become standardized vocabulary, reinforcing normativity and conveying ‘correctness’ and ‘legitimacy’ to information seekers.

Structures in Use

As a linguistic tool for information retrieval based on a controlled vocabulary set, the LCSH function best when the standard terms—the subject headings—are used. The LCSH also makes a limited attempt to recognize variants, to “route” searches using the variant terms to the subject headings, and thus to provide the same results. However, a search using terminology unrecognized as being related to a subject heading will receive no such help, and the search may fail. This is particularly the case when users search by subject, but there is also a similar effect with keyword searches.

Therefore, in recognizing certain terms, routing others to the standard terms, and in not recognizing others (resulting in poor retrieval results), the LCSH's structure also function to reinforce normativity of the selected terminology, and can be thought of acting to produce and reproduce discourse. The following is how it happens.

As a standard set of controlled vocabulary, the *LCSH* are a highly regulated system. There at least three distinct levels at which structural rules are applied: syntax of the subject headings themselves, subject strings, and the highest, cross-references. The cross-reference relationships are of greatest interest in our case. By introducing relationships *between* independent subject headings, cross-references are purported to guide the information seeker to the relevant subject heading/s that group the materials of most interest for the search.

In LCSH, three types of cross-reference relationships are recognized: equivalence (“variants”), hierarchy (“broader terms” and “narrower terms”), and association (“related terms”). Of these, relationships of hierarchy and association do not directly direct users, but actively construct topics and define their boundaries. On the other hand, relationships of equivalence direct users to find the materials they need under the standardized term (Chan 2007:237). Therefore, these relationships of equivalence, or *variants*, serve the very important function of connecting users to the materials they are seeking, even when they do not know the standard term for the topic in the system they are searching. However, the redirection reinforces normativity, suggesting that the standard term is the correct, legitimate description of the topic, rather than the terms chosen by the information seekers. In addition, some terms used by information seekers will be excluded altogether, not being recognized as variants. As a result, equivalence references

function as inherently power-laden processes of discursive production (see Given 2008:393). For example, these are the variants recognized for **Illegal aliens**:

Illegal Aliens

Variants

Aliens—legal status, laws, etc.

Aliens, Illegal

Illegal Aliens—legal status, laws, etc.

Illegal immigrants

Illegal immigration

Undocumented aliens

Source: LCSH entry for **Illegal aliens** (id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85003553.html)

As a result, users who search by subject for the subject “illegal immigrants,” a recognized variant, will be redirected to the heading **Illegal aliens** (and there to the library materials grouped under that topic heading), but who search for “unauthorized immigrants,” which is not a recognized variant, will encounter a failed search. Users who search by keyword will also be affected, as keyword searches search on all available metadata fields, including the Subject field in which LCSH are used. Users who search by a recognized term, if the term is used nowhere else in the record (in the Title field, for example), will also be unable to retrieve relevant results.

To show the impact of searching by subject using the standard term, a recognized variant, or unrecognized terminology, I conducted a database search study in Worldcat, a publicly available cooperative catalog. A full discussion of the study design is in the earlier *Methodology* section. The following is a summary of the subject search study, with parameters and results:

Table 3. Subject search results in Worldcat

Type	Subject heading (Control)	Recognized variant	Unrecognized term
Subject search entry	illegal aliens	illegal immigrants	undocumented migrants
Year	2014-2016		
Audience	Non-Juvenile		
Content	Non-Fiction		
Format	Book		
Facet refinement	Print book		
Number of retrieved records	291	221	2
% of Control	100%	75.9%	0.7%

In the direct subject search method, exactly matching the subject heading resulted in 291 results retrieved, which should represent, theoretically, all the records cataloged under the subject heading **Illegal aliens** matching all the specified characteristics. That search was used as the control for the following two searches. Using a recognized variant term resulted in the next best, though imperfect, retrieval, with 221 records found, or 75.9% of the control. The third search, with a term that is unrecognized in *LCSH*, was essentially a failure—with only 2 records retrieved, or 0.7% of the control.

In other words, unless the searcher uses the exact standard term, or at least a recognized variant, a search by subject will fail. Given that few users can be expected to know the exact standard term, which as we have seen is chosen among many competing possibilities, this is a serious concern. To alleviate this problem, individual libraries can choose to add additional terminology as recognized variants, but even so, it is impossible to predict all the possible variations (or typos) that users may enter as search terms. Given these difficulties, and the resulting low likelihood of success, it is understandable that users rarely choose to search by subject (Hjørland 2012:300-301). Though there are also

studies that reach a different conclusion, it seems that the low rate of subject heading use stems from the difficulty of matching the standard terminology, resulting in poor results or failed searches, and the reinforcement of keyword searching by predominant Internet search engines such as Google (Hjørland 2012: 301 Grey and Hurko 2012:17)

As a result, library catalogs often offer keyword searches as the default search. Nonetheless, subject indexing remains important (Hjørland 2012: 303). One reason is that in library catalog searches for non-digitized print material (such as books, for which there is no full text online), keyword searches mean searching for matching words in metadata fields—such as *Title*, *Author*, etc., and *Subject*—of catalog records. As a result, subject descriptors aid by adding potential words that can be matched to search terms, increasing the retrieval of relevant material (Grey and Hurko 2012:19). However, in keyword searches as in subject searches, LCSH subject headings can only aid the search if users happen to use the standard term or recognized variants.

In sum, LCSH serve a normative role, legitimating standard terminology, and with it a standardized conceptualization and worldview, that was previously only one choice among many possible. Therefore, it can be said that LCSH produce and reinforce discourse, and that they construct normative meanings. However, their role must also be understood in context: LCSH are only one system among many systems of knowledge representation.

Systemic Context

LCSH are limited to describing resources in library catalogs, and are one subject indexing system among others (the National Library of Medicine's Medical Subject

Headings being another important example). Speaking more broadly, LCSH are one knowledge organization system among many in the information landscape. Thus, the LCSH are far from a monolith; rather, they are always complemented in the information landscape by many other coexisting systems of knowledge representation such as different taxonomies, ontologies, classification systems, controlled vocabularies, or thesauri, which are variously used in the Semantic web, databases, or library catalogs (Soergel 1999:1119; Lesk 2005). In addition to these coordinated, and more or less controlled, systems of knowledge representation, many alternatives proliferate, such as search engines and user-generated tags and folksonomies (see Hjørland 2012:304; see also Vaidya and Harinarayana 2016 and Lu and Kipp 2014). Therefore, while it is important to critically consider LCSH, such a consideration should be complemented by an equally critical consideration of other systems, such as search engines: “Though Google and other search engines are impressive, they are not neutral or objective tools, as we tend to think (Hjørland 2012:311).

Nonetheless, LCSH are a nearly ubiquitous feature in library catalogs, conveying normative meanings simply by their presence. First, regardless of catalogers’ intentions, LCSH’s existence itself, as well as its organization and presentation, unavoidably suggest that information and their meanings are stable enough to organize into fixed categories. Secondly, LCSH carry meaning through the words that are chosen over others. Finally, when recognized as standard for subject description, LCSH carry an imprimatur of authority and construct normative meanings through its instrumental structures.

CONCLUSION

The debates over immigration in recent years, accompanying the Obama administration's immigration reform initiatives and the 2016 presidential campaign, have included intense debates over the representation of unauthorized immigrants through terminology in a variety of outlets, including the news media and the Library of Congress Subject Headings. A comparison of the responses of the news media when faced with these pressures, against the Library of Congress' responses and political consequences, show that the Library's complex institutional position—being funded and overseen by the U.S. Congress, while serving a wide variety of constituencies—may sometimes restrain it in its ability to respond to change. Among the stakeholders that have had a voice in the present challenge to update the subject heading **Illegal aliens** were individual users, who were college students, individual librarians, the professional organization American Library Association (ALA), various committees at ALA and at the Library of Congress, librarians at the Library of Congress, and legislators at the United States Congress. As a result, the process of changing the subject heading, directly related to the highly contested policy debates in the larger society about immigration, has been full of caution and fraught with challenges.

The difficulty in producing change, when combined with how LCSH are used as a linguistic tool for information retrieval—*i.e.* how users interact with them in library catalog interfaces, and how user searches are shaped by their structures—mean that the LCSH can contribute to legitimizing and reinforcing dominant discourses, and to constructing normative meanings. While the LCSH's power is mitigated by the coexistence of many other systems of knowledge representation, the LCSH continue to

be an influential and visible system, and it is important to continue considering them critically.

Future research could study how LCSH terminology influence the more frequent keyword searches in library catalogs; whether a greater diversity in the library and information professions could affect how LCSH and other systems of representation respond to social changes; and how other systems of knowledge representation in the broader information landscape also contribute to the production, reproduction and challenge of discourses on immigration.

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