ON THE DUBLIN CORE FRONT

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The Future of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules

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> "*He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.*"
> -- Sir Winston Churchill

ABSTRACT
This article discusses the impending update to the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR) and its potential impact on libraries and other metadata communities.

KEYWORDS
Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR) ; RDA ; Resource Description and Access ; cataloging ; metadata ; content rules

*E*ach summer, circulation staff in my library inventories a section of the stacks and brings collection issues to the attention of appropriate bibliographers. Since I am responsible for the economics collection, I see an array of government documents that have managed to elude the cataloging process.   Many of these titles are decades old, having squatted in the library undisturbed and uncirculated since our online catalog was implemented in 1990.   This summer's group of cunning books included annual reports from the Comptroller of the Currency; FALK Project reports, and texts of various legislative acts. My favorite book in the group, however, is the 1949 edition of the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, published by the United States Employment Service. Not surprisingly, the first occupation I flipped to was "librarian," which carried a definition that still pertains today (United States Employment Service, 1949):

> *Manages a library, supervising assistants and performing specific duties according*
> *to size of library: Selects books to be purchased by library, or approves or rejects list*
> *of books prepared by subordinates. Determines library policies and coordinates work*
> *of departments. Supervises the classification, cataloging, shelving, and circulation*
> *of books and periodicals. Works with schools or organizations, giving advice in*
> *courses of reading and references for research. Furnishes expert service in giving*
> *information from books on subjects of general or special interest to groups or individuals.*

Specialty occupations cross-referenced were "Librarian, Reference," "Medical Librarian," and "Patients' Librarian."   There was no heading for "Librarian, Technical Services," or even "Catalog Librarian."   "Cataloger" was listed, with the following brief definition:

> *Classifies books, magazines, or other library materials according to desired group headings, such as history, drama or fiction.*

By comparison, the latest version of the dictionary expands this definition significantly, though it is still inadequate by today's standards (Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 1991):

> *Compiles information on library materials, such as books and periodicals, and prepares catalog cards to identify materials and to integrate information into library catalog: Verifies author, title, and classification number on sample catalog card received from CLASSIFIER (library) against corresponding data on title page. Fills in additional information, such as publisher, date of publication, and edition. Examines material and notes additional information, such as bibliographies, illustrations, maps, and appendices. Copies classification number from sample card into library material for identification. Files cards into assigned sections of catalog. Tabulates number of sample cards according to quantity of material and catalog subject headings to determine amount of new cards to be ordered or reproduced. Prepares inventory card to record purchase information and location of library material. Requisitions additional cards. Records new information, such as death date of author and revised edition date, to amend cataloged cards. May supervise activities of other workers in unit.*

As the definitions above illustrate, change is inherent in libraries, and not more so than in cataloging. Whether systems, standards, or tasks, the cataloging community seems to remain in a constant state of transition. It's not going to get any easier in the near future. The hot topic in cataloging circles at the recent American Library Association Annual Conference was RDA: Resource Description and Access, the successor to AACR2. When the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR (JSC) announced that the new text would veer from the original path that was to be AACR3, many catalogers were stunned. Rather than the original plan to simply evolve in a natural way to AACR3, which seemed to be accepted by the cataloging community at large, RDA takes a more progressive approach to providing relatively simple content rules that could be adopted by various metadata communities in need of such guidance.

WHAT WILL RDA MEAN TO ME?

Since learning about RDA and some of the motivations behind it, I've thought about the consequences for my library staff, as well as the larger information world. I will go on record as saying I applaud the shift from AACR3 to RDA. The JSC was courageous to make such a move, especially knowing that many catalogers would think RDA's simplification a deterioration of cataloging standards. Although this may be the case, development of a code that could be far-reaching in the international community is a bold move, and if successful, will facilitate meaningful data exchange across disparate metadata providers, not to mention place ALA and its counterpart associations in high esteem among metadata communities in desperate need of simple, useful content rules.

That said, training and system redesign will require significant budget allocations. More difficult that the financial preparation may be the emotional distress some catalog librarians will undergo while adjusting to this new code. Comments I overheard while attending ALA lead me to believe this emotional hurdle will not be small for some.

RDA IN PRACTICE

"*Our cataloguing rules need to remain independent of any communication format. They also provide a content standard for elements of bibliographic description and access that could be used by any of the emerging metadata standards*" (Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, 2005).

It's exciting to imagine a world where use of RDA extends to metadata projects outside of the library system.   Even my small library is involved in a number of non-MARC bibliographic projects that would benefit from RDA's guidance. The strength and ultimate long-term value of RDA, however, will not be measured by library acceptance and utilization. Instead RDA will be judged by how well it accommodates the needs of cultural institutions outside the world of libraries. Will these communities find the rules easy to understand and implement? Are the rules appropriate and sensible? Can the value of adhering to RDA be quantified and illustrated? These are the questions that will need affirmative answers in order for RDA to achieve the JSC's bold vision.

CONCLUSION

Discussion about RDA will only get hotter as the JSC makes available sample chapters and an overall prospectus later this summer. It's highly unlikely RDA will take any drastic turns from its present course, but input from the cataloging community may play a role as RDA is finalized over the next two years. This is in some ways a risky step for the JSC, and one that will continue to draw attention.   Much like early detractors of Dublin Core and other non-MARC metadata schemes, I suspect RDA will ultimately convert even the most staunch traditionalists.

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