

Catalogers Group: RDA Part I Discussion
2/2/2006

Attended:

Sara Shatford Layne (discussion facilitator); Behzad Allahyar, Nora Avetyan, Peter Balassa, Melissa Beck, Sharon Benamou, Kathy Brill, Valerie Bross, Claudia Horning, Laura Horwitz, Chamya Kincy, Caroline Miller, Roxanne Peck, Liladhar R. Pendse, Hao Phan, Louise Ratliff, John Riemer, Elaine Shiner, Rita Stumps, Shohreh Zandieh

Background (presented by Sara Shatford Layne):

At ALA in 2005, the unveiling of AACR3 met with a firestorm of criticism. The ALA Joint Steering Committee took this criticism to heart, and started over with a new code, with a new name: Resource Description and Access (RDA). The code is intended to appeal not only to traditional library catalogers but also to other communities. One consequence is that RDA has begun to resemble a data dictionary, a listing of data elements. For example, the rules for imprint list publisher, place, and date as elements.

Shortly before ALA Midwinter 2006, the ALA Joint Steering Committee released a draft of Part I for comment. They are looking for “big picture” comments (except where decisions have already been made).

Locally, the UCLA Advisory Committee on Cataloging & Metadata (ACCM) has been looking at RDA and intends to submit group comments next Tuesday. If you wish to contribute comments, you may send them to Sara Shatford-Layne (slayne@library.ucla.edu) by Monday, February 6. Or, you may submit them directly using the web form at <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/tas/jca/ccda/> or the web form at <http://www.ala.org/alcts> . The deadline for comments is Tuesday, February 7.

Discussion Points:

- c. Cataloging v. Metadata: There has been quite a bit of discussion about what these terms mean. Is it useful to make a distinction between these? Or, should we be talking about various descriptive communities?
- d. RDA Format: The primary publication will be a web-based version, with options to pull out specific groups rules to facilitate cataloging for particular types of materials (e.g., cartographic). At ALA, two focus groups saw a conceptual version of the web-RDA.

The print draft does appear long & redundant. (This was one of the criticisms voiced at ALA Midwinter 2006.)

- e. RDA Structure:

RDA intentionally distinguished: Content v. Display v. Communication
Content= Rules for description (e.g., how to formulate a title)
Display= How to show the elements (e.g., Place : Publisher, date)
Communication=How to share RDA records

These distinctions are already made in our catalogs. For example, we have records created

according to AACR2 (content) with ISBD punctuation (display); and we use MARC21 to share the records (communication). But in OCLC Connexion, there are records that use AACR1 (content) without ISBN punctuation (display) and with MARC21 (communication). And there are other possibilities.

- a. Structure: This is a problem. RDA lacks rules for relationships among data elements.
 - Example: If a title page shows three places and three publishers, how should the cataloger show which place & publisher go together?
 - Example: Name/title pairings are hard to associate in Dublin Core; would be helpful if RDA content standard provided some guidance.
- b. ISBD: ISBD has intentionally been pulled out of Part I and put in an appendix as an option.
 - Comment: If libraries decide not to apply the ISBD option, how will this affect our ability to communicate MARC21 records & share content? There may be consequences to cooperative cataloging & to record-sharing if libraries choose different display options. Libraries have, in the past, used predictability for data manipulation, e.g., to derive new records from existing ones; this may be more difficult in the future. (Adolfo Tarango brought this up at ALA Midwinter)
 - Comment: Perhaps RDA, in association with various communities, will develop community-specific tools. For example, LC could publish its implementation decisions, for the benefit of other libraries that wish to follow the same implementation.
 - Comment: Within the web-RDA, perhaps communities could choose a preferred view. Catalogers in libraries, for example, could then choose to view RDA with ISBD-based examples.
- f. Transcription Wars: Beginning at ALA Midwinter, and continuing within the RDA discussion list, is a discussion that has been termed the “transcription wars.” There are two aspects of this.
 - a. Omission v. transcription: Example: Statement of responsibility:

Should the statement of responsibility be included in description? Or, is an access point adequate? Earlier codes allowed catalogers to omit the statement of responsibility if it was conceptually equivalent to the main entry. The trend in other metadata communities is to reduce redundancy; why not also follow that in traditional cataloging?

 - Comment: One argument for omitting the statement of responsibility (playing devil’s advocate) is that for online resources there is no need. One can just click on a link to see what the title page looks like.
 - Comment: It is unclear what will happen when there are multiple people & groups responsible for a resource. For example, what about a book that is written by X, translated by Y, and illustrated by Z? Are access points adequate substitutes?
 - Related: For collaborative works, how would we interpret a record that showed the first person’s name. For example, for children’s works, the illustrator may be named first, and the writer second. But if the illustrator and title appear in the brief display of the record, will that be enough to identify the book? Or, will it be confusing?
 - Related: RDA no longer uses the term “main entry” but the concept is still there. RDA uses “primary access point” instead.
 - Comment: Some communities may need the statement of responsibility more than others. For children 5-8, the phrase “by X” means something; a label “Author:” on a computer screen is not meaningful.

- Comment: Access points are not necessarily displayed in a brief record. But many brief displays do include the 245 \$c statement of responsibility. In those cases, omitting the statement of responsibility may make it harder for people to identify the right record.
- Comment: Authority work may also be impeded by omission of the statement of responsibility. How will we know usage, if we cannot see the statements of responsibility when we are establishing authority records for names?
- Comment: If omitting the statement of responsibility remains an option, the rationale for exclusion should be included in the code.

b. Abbreviation v. transcription:

In this case, RDA “transcription wars” is going in the opposite direction. The movement is to transcribe exactly, rather than using short forms (e.g., for publisher). And the movement is to enter whole words, rather than using abbreviations (e.g., “illustrations” rather than “ill.”). So on the one hand, there is a movement to pare down the record; on the other hand, to expand it. The argument in favor of eliminating abbreviations has been that abbreviations are a hold-over from the card catalog days, and the limited space on cards.

- Comment: Some reductions, such as the original AACR2 use of short forms (e.g., “260 \$b The Hospital”) in the publisher statement were un-helpful for keyword searching. And perhaps further expanding this trend in RDA, to use of the exact publisher statement, may yield better search results. For example, perhaps “John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated” will permit better search results than “Wiley”
- Comment: Is it really true that we are no longer limited in space, since the electronic record need not be limited? The computer screen still provides limited space--since most readers only look at the first screen. Also, OPAC configuration teams often cut off parts of the record in creating displays.
 - Related: Even if the first screen doesn't have the information, there will always be people who do consult the other screens. Audiences differ.
 - Related: Content notes may be important. Even if the full content note is not displayed, it is still important for retrieval (through indexes). Amazon.com has shown this.
 - Related: Storage is cheap (in favor of longer records); but the appetite is for shorter records (in favor of shorter displays)

c. Other issues related to transcription:

- Other communities: Transcription wars are not new. The Rare Books Community has been engaged in one for years
- Capitalization: Another aspect of the discussion has been whether we should bother with capitalization rules
- Redundancy: If programs made better use of the fixed field, e.g., for illustration data, we would not need to care about “ill.” versus “illustrations.” The interface program should just take the coded data & display the desired term (whether “ill.” or “illustrations”). This should also be done for index notes and bibliography notes.
- Typos in the title: Another aspect of the transcription wars is whether or not to transcribe typos on the title page. Those looking to machine transcription may prefer to transcribe as-is; others may not.

- Related: For some time, automatic transcription based on title pages has been a dream. But considering the complexity of title pages, is this realistic? [It has not worked so far]

5. RDA: Other comments

- a. Text-centric perspective: Some have criticized RDA as being too text-centric. For example, books are more likely to have statements of responsibility than do other resources. Perhaps the focus on statement of responsibility *is* text-centric
- b. Simplification: RDA intentionally seeks to simplify rules. RDA 2.1.1. gives guidance on choosing a chief source: “choose a source of information identifying the resource as a whole as the basis for identification of the resource.”
 - Common use: RDA depends on common use to determine the preferred source. For example, a “title page” is commonly used within the library community as chief source. But what if there is no title page? Does RDA follow common use for the AV community?
 - Related: In training students and other non-library people to enter records, not one person intuitively opens a book & turns to the title page. All start from the cover.
 - Related: An advantage of preferring title page may lie in how closely it is tied to the text. Covers may come off; the title page is part of the text block.
 - Simplification: RDA simplifies the rule, but does it really simplify our work?
 - Multiple sources:
 - 2.2.2 Discusses what to do if there is more than one preferred source: “use as the preferred source of information the first occurring...” But what does this mean, outside a book?
- c. Place of publication: There has been some discussion about how to interpret RDA for place of publication. If the title page has “London,” in which cases should the cataloger give the larger place in a note? For law librarians, including the larger place is always important, since it’s important to know the jurisdiction related to a law. But what about other cataloging situations?
- d. Terminology: Another point of contention is terminology. RDA seeks to eliminate library jargon. But this has led to discussions of what term to use instead.
 - For example, RDA uses “citation”—which has already been used by the law community with a specialized meaning. What should be used instead of *citation*? Would *normalized title* be better? Or, is there a better term?
 - For example, RDA uses “continuing resources” sparingly. What are the implications?
 - We need to address the cataloging issues relevant to ‘mutable’ resources—or exclude these resources altogether from RDA.
- e. FRBR: RDA seeks to incorporate RDA into the rules. How well does this work?
 - Comment: Martha Yee has pointed out that the RDA model assumes that some attributes identify a work; other attributes identify an expression; etc. But this is not true; we cannot cut up the description in this way. The Title, for example, does *not* always identify a work.

- Comment: FRBR is a model of looking at record structures independent of the description. But FRBR is a model and cataloging is an act; these are two different things.