IFLA Satellite Meeting on RDA

The International Community's Reaction to RDA

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My presentation is an attempt to summarise some of the reactions to the proposed new cataloguing rules, RDA. I do it both as chair of the Standing Committee of the IFLA Cataloguing Section and as Chair of the Cataloguing Committee of the Swedish Library Association, the rule-making body in Sweden, which is one of the organisations that tries to follow the development of the rules - and comment on each new available draft.
In my 20 allotted minutes I can't enter into everything that I would wish to, but I will have to concentrate on a few tracks that I have found more general throughout the comments received. Since we will have a presentation of the German comments later I have deliberately not studied them as much as the rest.
Maybe some of the questions I raise today have already been answered this morning. I apologise for that in that case, however my paper has been based on what I knew after the latest world wide review this spring. If the questions that I rise have already been solved, then so much better! That's what world wide reviews are for!

RDA - New rules - international rules (?)

One opinion expressed in many of the comments is the fact that the creation of RDA is a unique opportunity to make something completely new, to reconsider current rules and practises and to leave behind the catalogue card way of thinking. It is a great chance for us to completely move into the world of computerised cataloguing.

The appreciation has been great from the international community for the initiative to try to make the AACR2 into a new set of rules more intended for international use and less Anglo-American. However, we must remember, that this is so far an initiative. A lot more adaptations need to be made before this set of rules is truly "international".

We all understand the difficulty in creating a set of rules that is said to be intended for international use when it is more or less only developed by one part, i.e. the AACR community. The rest of the world cataloguing community has been responding to the World Wide Reviews, but not taken that much of an active role in the preparatory work. So it is still a set of rules developed by one "part", but intended for international use. The way IFLA has been working with the International Meeting of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code (IME-ICC) might have been a more inspiring approach - but of course too cumbersome for specific cataloguing rules like the AACR/RDA.

We are all fully aware of the fact that the prerequisites for the JSC have changed several times during the work with RDA, due to various factors making the process more difficult to follow. The work being performed by the JSC is extremely laborious and is worth great acknowledgment. The desire to satisfy both the Anglo-American cataloguing community and be open to international adaptations can't be easy to handle.

RDA and other standards

The adaptation to the IFLA models FRBR and FRAD is welcome and absolutely necessary. The coming rules must follow the line of thought and the terminology laid out in these models as far as possible. But there are a few questions:

- ❖ The FRAD model is not yet complete. How will the JSC handle that?
- ❖ Have coming models been taken into consideration, e.g. FRSAR?

The importance of the use of other existing international standards must be stressed, above all standards and models developed by IFLA, and here the most important one is the ISBD standard. An international set of rules cannot be developed without paying attention to what has already been developed and what is in use by so many cataloguing codes. The ISBD standard is being used in many countries as THE cataloguing code, in others as a foundation for the cataloguing code.

However, times have changed and of course one might question what was earlier impossible to question, e.g. the importance of standard bibliographic description in comparison to access points and authority work. I would dare to say that there is a tendency today in favour of authority work, maybe sometimes at the expense of bibliographic description. And for modern works maybe rightly so? We now have identifiers to uniquely identify most resources.

Reference to some other important international guidelines is still lacking, but we hope they will be there when the final draft is out (e.g. Names of Persons, GARR). We do realise though that some of these documents have different status internationally. Some have been adopted in some countries, whereas others have not. Some have also never been officially authenticated by IFLA. It is however considered important to mention them and consider them in the work. Most of the standards lacking are approved of within the IME-ICC work and if they are approved by IME-ICC, then RDA should also include them. If for some reason the JSC has decided that a standard should not be followed that should be clearly stated.

According to latest news from the JSC, the draft for the General Introduction will however acknowledge the importance of both the ISBD and the FRBR standards among other standards that have been consulted.

In some replies to the worldwide review the use of Wikipedia as a reference source of information has been questioned. If the library system has high demands on reliability Wikipedia should not be the first source to go to, is a feeling reflected in these comments.

RDA - National versus international praxis

How well adapted is RDA to the re-use of information between different library systems? The high degree of optionality given in RDA may create different local practices making information exchange more difficult.

- – *International cataloguing rules demand a great deal of optionality to include national variations*
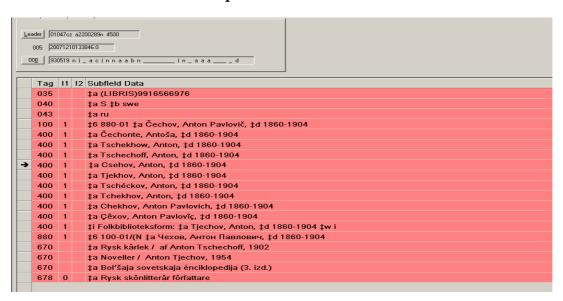
> – *but international exchange of records needs more streamlined catalogues*
>
> *a bit of a dilemma!*

Transliteration should follow international standards when such exist. This is a view expressed in the reply from the French National Library and of course it would have been wonderful if we could all follow standards even in this field. However this has so far been impossible since commonly known local transliteration systems in many countries are very strong, above all among the "ordinary users" of the catalogue. This applies above all to the transliteration of Cyrillic text. E.g. in Sweden there is one Cyrillic transliteration system for the public libraries following a local Swedish transliteration system and another one for research libraries following the ISO standard. Among the common users the public library transliteration system is by far the most well known.

Would the Virtual International Authority File be a way out? If something like this was used by more institutions we would have the possibility for each institution to use the form it prefers, no matter what transliteration, as long as the other form is recognised by the system.

Transliteration - Swedish example

RDA - Important aspects of the new rules

It is an important and appreciated step forward that the cataloguing rules will include both rules for authority work and relationships. Finally authority work is given as much credit as ordinary cataloguing! According to many comments the revision could have started though with an analysis of which access points should actually have authorized and controlled forms. After that exercise, it would have been logical to turn to the navigational requirements that should be supported by the cataloguing process and decide which relationships should be established.

The General Material Designation (GMD) of today's cataloguing rules mixes the attributes for carriers and content. The goal must be to define in an easy manner the carrier and content types that the user wishes to distinguish between. In RDA the GMD is replaced by the more strict *Media type*. The general nature of *Media type*, however, makes it difficult to use in

practice. More work is likely needed to keep the distinction between these three clear and particularly to keep the definition of Media type unambiguous.

In MARC21 many of the attributes for *Media, Content* and *Carrier types* can be expressed through codes in coded fields. In RDA where the components are mapped to MARC21 many elements do not make out a clean match however. The sets of rules that are applied by RDA usually tend to be more specific than the ones applied by MARC21. It would be preferable to have a clear mapping.

Cataloguing rules should be format independent. Many comments stress very hard the fact that we should never pay too much consideration to the format when we are writing cataloguing rules. The format must be written following the rules, not the other way around!

RDA is supposed to be written for all kinds of resources, but many still have the impression that it has a strong bias towards textual resources (one example would be the chronological cut 1501 – very traditional with regard to textual works)

RDA - Implementation

Timeframe
There is a general fear that the timeframe is too narrow. Can all desired amendments be taken into account? The JSC now has hundreds of pages of comments to consider. Will they make it? The lack of time must not lead to the rules being written and published too rashly. It is better to wait a couple of more months then and have a well written product.

The rules do not exist in a vacuum
Will the environment in which RDA should operate be able to adjust in time? Once again a question of time! Do we have time to adjust the various library formats to make them compatible with RDA? What about ILS vendors, OPAC designers etc.?

The order of things
We have already noted that in a perfect world the International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) of the IME-ICC would be the foundation for the RDA, and the FRBR, FRAD (and possibly even FRSAR) finished to be neatly fitted into this new cataloguing code. But what about the "carrier" of our records, i.e. the catalogue formats? Will MARC 21 be adjusted to the new rules before they are implemented? What does MARBI say? Will RDA also be manageable in other formats, such as UNIMARC? Have there been any discussions?

RDA - Form of the document

The new organisation of the set of rules is most welcome, but the outline is, by most institutions, still regarded as overly complex and with too much repetition.
It is a good thing to leave behind the form structured according to media type, but the new structure is still somewhat loose for most readers to get a grasp of.

For many non native-English speakers the wordings are too long and complex. Maybe this is the case for native English speakers too? The wordings are also sometimes considered imprecise and general. May the reason for this be a true desire when writing the rules not to

be too precise? However this leads to the fact that the user needs to deduce the rules by studying the examples, which of course makes cataloguing more cumbersome.

RDA - Structure of the document

RDA constantly grows in complexity, probably due to the fact that it is primarily intended as a web product. However it is very hard to judge a product, of which the final structure is still so little known. Different chapters have been sent for World Wide Review at different times, but no one, except the JSC, really knows what the final product will look like.

Giving opinions about a document intended as a web product, but sent out for World Wide Review in printed form, has not been such a good way to approach this. It would have been better to have a test version online from the very beginning in which the reviewers could see the structure - or at least get an idea of what it was going to look like.

The information is often seen as partitioned and split up. The reader needs to jump from one paragraph to the other to bring together information needed. Hopefully this will be solved through the software that is used for creating the product.

Another issue stressed in the comments is the view that the rules should be reorganised more fully to be in accordance with FRBR tasks and entities, starting with work etc. As the product looked in its last draft the focus is still on manifestation and item, reminding us of the old rules. At least a visual apparatus to make the FRBR entities and user tasks more easily understandable would be highly appreciated.
[The latest information from the JSC states that this will be solved in the October draft]

Too many repetitions of texts
This is particularly abundant in chapters concerning relationships, according to some comments. References to other parts of the document often lead to deadlocks and makes reading tiresome and hard. Do we not risk the problem of having a web product with a somewhat tough navigation? *[However according to latest news from the JSC this has been solved in the next version of the draft]*

Authority records <-> Access points in bibliographic records
It is sometimes hard to see whether the rules give reference to access points or authority records. The same criticism applies here as earlier: it is hard to know where you are. The cataloguer needs to be sure whether the rule he/she is reading pertains to creating access points or authority records.

Examples
Since this is primarily an online product why not make use of this as regards the examples and hyperlink to versions of full records in which the problem being looked for can be seen in its full context? Single linear examples are not all that helpful. However in that case someone, or some institution, needs to be responsible for the online example to see to it that nothing happens to it that changes it to be contradictory to what the rule says.

Footnotes
There should be no footnotes in a web product. These must instead be inserted as comments inside the text. [*Obviously the JSC is working on this issue presently*]

RDA - Online product or printed as well?

RDA has been presented as primarily an online product. How will it be accessed? At what cost? We are used today to buying a printed product and then not worry about the price anymore. Now we face the "risk" of having to pay a yearly fee to access our cataloguing rules. There is a risk that small libraries will consider that investment too heavy to make. Institutions and others outside the library community might want to access the rules. Will they be willing to pay the subscription fees as well? What subscription rates and levels of access will there be? Will RDA be printed and in that case what will the size of a possible printed RDA be?

RDA - Rights questions

What will the stipulations be when countries outside the Anglo-American library community want to translate RDA? What if the countries translating want to do their own versions, not 100 % RDA, but with own interpretations of some rules? The way most countries have dealt with AACR so far is by having AACR as some kind of foundation to which modifications are added, in some instances to a small extent, in others to a greater. How many modifications/changes will be possible until RDA stops being RDA?

What if the foreign publishers would want to publish the rules online free of charge in their language. Would that be allowed? Is a license needed? Will it then be paid for by the publisher of the rules?

Specific comments

My presentation here was actually to be a presentation of the "reactions" of the international cataloguing community. Maybe what I have given is more questions – but then, the final presentation of the set of rules still being somewhat wrapped in mystery (at least until this morning) - the reactions can only be expressed in a number of questions. Some of the answers we got this morning, but a some questions still remain to be answered. In my last slides I would like to add some more specific comments to some parts of the rules.

Compilations as works with compiler as preferred access point:
Obviously the proposal for RDA is to change the rules so as to give the compiler primary access point if he/she is also creator of that work, not just editor. But this is a very hard rule to write – so why actually bother?

Initial articles in titles
Initial articles should never be omitted under the pretext that they have not to be taken into account for the alphabetical ordering of titles. In the English language articles can be omitted without changing the meaning or grammatical correctness of the title. This is not the case in many other languages. Leaving out an initial article can lead to a completely different meaning of the title - or just a grammatically very incorrect title, e.g. Das wohltemperierte Klavier by Bach, which becomes "Wohltemperierte Klavier", a grammatical impossibility. Dropping the initial articles is a matter of software programming and should be dealt with by

the programmers. One could also discuss why initial articles have to be dropped at all. Why not just leave them as they are?

The removal of unwanted definite and undefinite articles has been possible in library OPACs in Europe for decades. It was the hope of many European cataloguers that this would also be possible in the new Anglo-American cataloguing code of the 21st century. As I said before cataloguing rules should not be written for the library OPACs. The library OPACs should be adapted to the library catalogues and their rules.

Uniform titles/Preferred titles

What sense does it make to replace Essays. Selections with Selected essays? Why keep the group uniform titles in the first place?

[Selections will be kept according to the latest information from the JSC]

The spelling out of Old and New Testaments has made understanding of the Bible Uniform titles easier. But why exclude the testaments when naming a single book? Does this not make finding more difficult for the user?

Will the problem of naming the Jewish and Christian Bible be solved? Is the excluding of the testaments is a way in that direction? If it is then we more easily understand why it is done.

Anonymous Classics

When choosing preferred titles for anonymous classics the standard should, according to most comments, be Anonymous Classics published by IFLA.

Peronal and institutional names

For name forms the form selected by the National Bibliographic Agency of that country should be the preferred one - as long as that is possible. This is also something that has been stressed by the IME-ICC. For libraries in the parts of the world where these forms need to be transcribed this can of course not be the case. But most important: all variants of names must be linked together through an authority record, linked authority records, or something similar. Here again I would like to mention the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) as a very good example of a solution to this problem.

The form used by the National Bibliographic Agency should usually also have precedence to the form used in a national encyclopaedia, if that varies. The National Bibliographic Agency is often more apt to knowing which form is the preferred one for authors of its own country.

Abbreviations

Skipping abbreviations is very positive, but then that must be applicable to all domains. The abbreviations of US States may be publicly known to everyone in the US, but they are not in the rest of the world.

Access points

How important is it to have complicated rules for which author should be primary or secondary access point? Is it not more valuable to put effort into making correct access points and authority records than to ponder on whether they should be primary or secondary? Of course it is important to have rules for primary access points when you have a library with open shelves. Sometimes you also need them for citing relationships. But keep them as simple as possible.

Could not the question of primary and secondary access points be handled by a modern library system instead in which the librarian marks which access points he/she prefers as

primary? This could also be applicable for authority files (like in VIAF). Why not have an opportunity to choose which form in the authority file is the preferred one?

Identifiers
Identifiers designate records, not entities and usually give reference to LC record numbers. The identifiers given in the examples should preferably go to entities.

Dates
What is 09/08/08? Dates should preferably be given in an internationally accepted format or at least stored in the system in a way that the system knows what date is intended. Then it can be presented in different ways.

Polyglot works
Polyglot works are sometimes asked for by patrons. Since they have been taken out of RDA they can no longer be searched for. It is not a big deal but something worth mentioning.

What will happen now?

The RDA is now being prepared for its last World Wide Review before the release of the set of rules next year. After this great world wide review the JSC will most likely have received a large number of reactions from the international cataloguing community, some of which probably touch the areas I have mentioned today. There will also be opinions expressed from within IFLA and its Section on Cataloguing – above all from the Working Groups on FRBR and ISBD – where the ISBD consolidated is actually undergoing its first revision right now. The International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) will be ready this autumn and of course RDA shouldn't prescribe anything that contradicts them.

Hopefully the final product will be something even better than what we can see to day – but of course all the world's cataloguing problems won't be solved by this set of rules either. It's a continuing process – and new revisions will come – sooner than we think. The world is changing rapidly and with it our way of describing it.

I wish you all the best in your future revision and reviewing work and hope that you will enjoy the coming week's World Library Information Congress.