To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA

From: Kathy Glennan, ALA Representative

Subject: Fictitious and other entities in RDA and the consolidated FR models

ALA thanks the Fictitious Working Group for their clear explication of the issues surrounding fictitious, pseudonymous and non-human entities in RDA.

The majority of ALA respondents, most of whom are catalogers, fully support the Working Group's analysis and recommendations. However, a few with an archival background took exception to the idea of putting real and fictional entities on the same plane.

With the goal of moving RDA to a more principles-based content standard that is adopted outside of the library community, decisions will have to be made about which principles are favored over others. ALA suggests charging the soon-to-be appointed JSC Archives Working Group with drafting an assessment of the objectives and principles of RDA from an archival perspective. This work would help inform the next steps in identifying and reconciling these different points of view.

Issues for discussion

Definition of person

Although the draft FRBR-LRM defines person as "An individual human being", other international standards used with linked data have broader definitions, along the lines the current RDA definition:
- Schema.org: "A person (alive, dead, undead, or fictional)."
- FOAF: "The Person class represents people. Something is a Person if it is a person. We don't nitpic about whether they're alive, dead, real, or imaginary. The Person class is a sub-class of the Agent class, since all people are considered 'agents' in FOAF."
- ISNI: "The International Standard Name Identifier is an ISO Standard developed as a global identification system of Public Identities of parties. Parties can be a natural person, a legal entity, or a fictional character."

Both the Schema.org and FOAF vocabularies/definitions are used heavily in representing bibliographic information in the linked-data world; maintaining the relationship between RDA and these standards is desirable.

Since 2009, RDA has closely aligned its definition of "person" with the one contained in FRAD. This was a significant change in Anglo-American practice and has had a far-reaching impact on cataloging policies, authority records, subject analysis, etc. ALA does not support rolling back the progress made over the past 60-70 years to describe entities based on how they describe themselves. We agree with the Working Group that RDA's current definition supports several general principles of the International Cataloguing Principles, including the convenience of the user, and the principle of representation.

User needs

We agree with the Working Group that the user communities for RDA data are highly varied and have substantially different needs. These differences will only become greater as RDA is more widely adopted outside of libraries. As observed in the paper, under AACR2, children's librarians frequently cited the inability of their users to find books by Geronimo Stilton. More advanced library users might understand that a particular book about Sherlock Holmes is not really by John Watson, but they also might not know the actual author. The new approach in RDA helped address these issues. On the other hand, this change in practice does not support the documentation of documenting actual, verifiable identities and relationships. Perhaps the role of a real human being has a greater importance when describing an archival collection, rather than an individual manifestation.

What universe: bibliographic, or actual?

ALA is concerned with the assertion inherent in FRBR-LRM – that only sentient beings can be creators. This aligns with a particular view of the real world, but it is an over-simplification. In relation to animals as creators, whale songs certainly are not the creation of the person recording them. "Indeed, some scientists are convinced that animals have the emotional complexity to perceive beauty, make esthetic choices, and produce forms (or song) for art's sake."[1]

Instead, ALA believes that the models underlying RDA need to support an understanding of the bibliographic universe. This focus supports user needs, as noted above, as well as any efforts that catalogers must undertake to determine the nature of the entity represented as a creator. A linked data environment should be able to support both statements of fictitious authorship as well as the identification of the actual person behind a pseudonym. To reach the widest audiences, RDA will need the ability to identify fictitious, pseudonymous and non-human entities as creators, as well as to identify the real human being, family, or corporate body that is responsible – it should not constrain the kind of entity that can be identified as a creator. To achieve this, we believe that RDA needs to support relationships between alternate and real identities as well as between various alternate identities. In relation to the latter case, while it may be theoretically possible to determine the "real identity", doing so might not always be worth the time and effort required.

Beyond real persons

ALA agrees that the definitions of families and corporate bodies should be expanded to include fictitious, pseudonymous and non-human entities. We also support treating non-human agents as creators or contributors, when appropriate, for the reasons noted above.

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[1] Robin Cembalest, Birds Do It, Bees Do It: Taking Animals' Art Skills Seriously, 03/28/13 (http://www.artnews.com/2013/03/28/animals-making-art/)

Attributes of fictitious entities

Discussions on the PCCLIST in August 2015 centered on the recording of attributes for fictitious entities, such as birth date, death date, birth place, etc. Certain fictitious personas have such "biographical" information available, such as the composer P.D.Q. Bach (http://www.schickele.com/pdqbio.htm). However, the usefulness of such attributes to identify fictitious entities (and to be used in authorized access points) is questionable. In terms of differentiation, ALA believes it would be more helpful to record an attribute that conveys that the entity is a fictitious character. We also note that some of these "attributes" can change over time, especially if different creators use the same fictitious character in their works. Thus, ALA recommends that application profiles include guidance about recording "biographical" information for fictitious entities.