



RDA, or, The Long Journey of the Catalog to the Digital Age¹

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Background

The world has several cataloguing codes in use now, and the one used most widely throughout the world prior to this century was the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition or AACR2. Despite its wide use, during the 1990's, there were many complaints from users around the world about how impossible AACR2 was after all of the amendments and updates.

The complaints were made during conferences; they were posted on listservs, and stated in correspondence with the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (JSC). Those of us on the JSC heard and also agreed that AACR2 was getting too complex; there was no logical structure to it; that it mixed up content and carrier terms; and it was missing hierarchical and other relationships important to the things we catalogue. That was understandable, because AACR2 was written before the Internet and before the IFLA conceptual models and international cataloguing principles were agreed. The Joint Steering Committee, who was responsible for the rules, also received requests from around the world to please remove the

¹ This article is based on several of Dr. Tillett's presentations given in Taiwan, Mainland China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Hawaii, the Philippines, Turkey, and Japan during 2012-13. An earlier version of this paper was published as: "The International Development of RDA: Resource Description and Access." *Alexandria*, v. 24, no. 2 (2013), p. 1-10.





Anglo-American biases, so it could be used more globally. So, those of us then on the JSC decided it was time to do something about these complaints.

More precisely, in the late 1990's the JSC decided to actively try to make changes for the future of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*. We realized that all the changes in our environment with the World Wide Web and increasing Internet access, as well as the development of conceptual models that gave us a new way to look at our environment, also gave us new opportunities for improving how we catalogue and how we deliver bibliographic information to users. In 1997, the JSC held the *International Conference on the Principles & Future Development of AACR* in Toronto, Canada. We invited experts from around the world to share in developing an action plan for the future of AACR.

Some of the recommendations from that meeting guided the thinking about new directions, such as the desire to document the basic principles that underlie the rules and explorations into content versus carrier. Some recommendations from that conference were quickly implemented, like the “new” views of seriality – with continuing resources and harmonization of serials cataloguing standards among the ISBD, ISSN, and AACR communities. Other recommendations from that conference are now goals for RDA, like further internationalization of the rules for their expanded use worldwide as a content standard for bibliographic and authority data.

AACR3 becomes RDA

In 2002 work began on a draft revision of AACR2 then called AACR3. However, by April 2005, the plan had changed. The reactions to the initial draft of AACR3 came from rule makers around the world and from national libraries and other



organizations, including the German Expert Group for RAK (Regeln für die alphabetische Katalogisierung) and the Deutsche Bibliothek (now the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek), national libraries in Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, South Africa, and more. Those international comments really helped improve the instructions. The JSC was very appreciative of the time and effort that everyone contributed to the process. The comments particularly raised concerns about the need to move to closer alignment with the FRBR model and to build an element set. The Internet world and visions of the Semantic Web from Tim Berners-Lee had started really taking off, and it was clear doing cataloguing the way we always had would no longer do. We could not continue to produce “records” in the MARC format in systems that could not talk to the rest of the information community – we had to plan for the future to assure libraries would remain a vital part of that broader community. We needed to plan for linked data environments and beyond.

So, a new structure and plan were developed, and the name was changed to *Resource Description and Access* to emphasize the two important tasks of description and access. Importantly from the world perspective, the JSC removed the Anglo-American emphasis to take a more international view. The JSC also changed its own name to the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (still JSC).

IFLA influences

RDA is based on two international conceptual models: *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR, 1998) and *Functional Requirements for Authority Data* (FRAD, 2009), developed by working groups of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) with worldwide input and



review. FRBR reinforces the basic objectives of catalogues and the importance of relationships. This helps users to fulfil basic tasks with respect to the catalogue – enabling people to find, identify, select, and obtain information they want. These are known as the FRBR user tasks.

FRBR also offers us a structure to meet these basic user tasks. It includes an entity-relationship model – a conceptual model of how the bibliographic universe operates – identifying all the things in this universe and how they are related. It allows us to group together the things that share the same intellectual and artistic content. It gives us a new way of looking at our bibliographic universe. As Graciela Spedalieri from Argentina said during FRBR training in Latin America, it's like putting on a new pair of glasses to see the universe in a new way. It also includes the set of data elements or attributes that are mandatory for a national level bibliographic record. Those elements in FRBR translate directly into RDA as core elements for bibliographic description and access.

A third model for subject authority data (FRSAD, 2010) was published by IFLA with an even more generalized abstract, conceptual model, that basically declared the obvious: things have subjects. That is acknowledged in RDA, but the FRSAD model that added “thema” and “nomen” does not offer further organizational or structural components to incorporate in RDA beyond what was already in FRBR. Development continues on a consolidated conceptual model tentatively called FRBR-Library Reference Model (FRBR-LRM), which is being closely monitored by those maintaining RDA.

Another IFLA worldwide activity from 2003 to 2008 resulted in the *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* (ICP) (IFLA, 2009), replacing the 1961 “Paris Principles” (IFLA, 1971). The



JSC and the RDA Editor, Tom Delsey, worked with drafts of FRAD and ICP as RDA was developed. From FRBR and FRAD conceptual models, RDA gets the entities, identifying attributes for each entity – including “core” elements, the relationships, and user tasks. From ICP, RDA gets basic principles like the principle of representation – used for transcription of data – and the principle of convenience of the user, for making the descriptions and notes understandable to our users. The user comes first and should always be kept in mind when providing bibliographic descriptions and access points. RDA combines the FRBR conceptual model with cataloguing principles to give us the intellectual foundations to build cataloguer’s judgment and better systems for the future.

Collaborations

The Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA paid close attention to developments in IFLA as well as in various metadata communities, and initiated collaborations with the international publishers’ community that was developing its own metadata set called ONIX. Together we developed controlled vocabularies for media types, content types, and carrier types, called the RDA/ONIX Framework.

In 2007, “JSC representatives” (Tom Delsey, Gordon Dunsire, and Barbara Tillett) met at the British Library with key representatives from Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI), IEEE/LOM, and Semantic Web communities and agreed to examine the fit between RDA and other metadata models. Together we created an initial registry for the RDA elements and controlled terms, available freely on the Web (OMR, 2009-15). In 2012 there was a follow-up meeting in London to continue the initial efforts with the DCMI and the JSC with a goal to continue



to develop an application profile and schema for RDA. The Committee of Principals, which oversees the Joint Steering Committee and the funds for development of RDA, also established a Technical Committee to advise it regarding the development of the schema and application profile and other technical issues related to the continued development of RDA. Their first meeting was in February 2013 in London. In 2014 the JSC Technical Working Group and the RDA Toolkit Technical Committee superseded the Committee of Principals Technical Committee. The JSC Technical Working Group focuses on internal aspects of RDA, and the RDA Development Team (formerly known as the RDA Toolkit Technical Committee) focuses on applications, linked data, and other external aspects.

In 2008 the JSC started participating in a joint effort to determine what revisions were necessary to accommodate the encoding of RDA in MARC 21. The RDA/MARC Working Group presented proposals to MARBI, the committee within the American Library Association that oversaw changes to the MARC format. Those MARC changes were implemented in local integrated library systems just as was done regularly with other updates to MARC. However, it is clear MARC is a limitation to reaching the goals in RDA to be more usable in the Semantic Web/linked data environment, so it is encouraging that work is underway, led by the Library of Congress through its Bibliographic Framework Initiative, to find a transition plan beyond MARC.

In addition to the collaborations with other metadata communities, the JSC also started a process to collaborate with librarians and cataloguers and archivists around the world to develop proposals for RDA to move to more principle-based rules. This process still continues. For example, the work with the music library associations in the US and Canada with the Library



of Congress and interested parties in Germany (now broadened to representation from EURIG – the European RDA Interest Group) is still ongoing with much work yet to be done. A working group called the RDA Music Working Group is currently coordinating that work.

Collaborations also were conducted in the areas of law, religious works, rare books and materials, and more. In fact, with all of these consultations and collaborations, the JSC found that we were not able to discuss some issues sufficiently in time for the first release of RDA, so many issues were deferred for continued discussions that are now ongoing, especially through the various working groups that report to the Steering Committee.²

I want to point out that the so-called ‘missing’ things from RDA (that remain under development) were not in AACR2 either. The JSC heard complaints that we should stay with AACR2 until RDA was ‘done’, but even with the ‘missing’ or ‘placeholder’ chapters, RDA has more than AACR2 ever had (e.g., many of the RDA Ch. 3 attributes for modern carriers, the Ch. 4 acquisition and access information, the authority control instructions, and relationships). Chapter 23 on subject relationships was added in 2015. RDA development has been a very open process; the types of collaborations and reviews of drafts were unprecedented in earlier cataloguing code development. That openness had its good aspects (diversity of input) and bad aspects (negative press, misconceptions based on out-dated drafts, etc.).

Transitions

² See the full list of RSC Working Groups and their terms of reference at <http://www.rda-rsc.org/workinggroups>.



Just as AACR2 provided a transition from the card catalogue to the online catalogue, so it is with RDA. We will have a transition or “bridge” period for a few years as we move from current practices and formats and systems to the next generation of systems.

The RDA instructions will continue to evolve. RDA is being updated in a more timely and dynamic manner than AACR2 was, as I will explain later. Although in 2015 the JSC was renamed to the RDA Steering Committee (RSC), it continues to look forward to suggestions for improvements that are more principle based and more in line with FRBR and FRAD. There is still much work to be done, and the RSC looks forward to your help.

RDA goals

The Joint Steering Committee originally stated our purpose for RDA as: “a new standard for resource description and access, designed for the digital world”. In other words RDA is a Web-based tool that was optimized for use as an online product. That was a goal for the new code. Work continues to reach that goal of an effective Web-based tool through feedback from users to the publishers of the RDA Toolkit.

Other goals for RDA were identified in the “Strategic Plan for RDA, 2005-2009” posted on the JSC’s Web site (now archived). RDA was to be

- a tool that addresses cataloguing all types of content and media (the JSC for the most part achieved that goal, but there is ongoing work with special communities, especially for moving images, archives, and museum resources), and



- a tool that results in records that are intended for use in the digital environment – through the Internet, Web-OPACs, etc. – and most recently to make the descriptions useful in the linked data environment of the Semantic Web. The records created using RDA's metadata set of elements are intended to be readily adaptable to newly emerging data structures.

These are other specific goals stated for RDA in the Strategic Plan and understood by the JSC as working goals that can be summarized as follows:

- Assure the instructions are easy to use and interpret
- Encourage use beyond the library community
- Be compatible with other similar standards
- Have a logical structure based on internationally agreed principles
- Separate content and carrier data
- Provide more examples.

Many of these goals have been met but clearly the RSC has not yet reached all of the goals. Some that have been met are those regarding increasing the understand-ability of the text and providing more examples. Following the US RDA test in 2010-2011, work was conducted and completed in 2013 to reword the instructions to be more easily understood. Additionally, many more examples continue to be added through the RDA Examples Editor. The RSC continues to make good progress and welcomes proposals for improvements.

Internationalization



The goal for internationalization is stated in the RDA instructions at 0.11, which reinforces that ‘RDA is designed for use in an international context.’ Even though RDA is initially written in English and the vocabularies are in English, the design is such that RDA can be easily adapted to other language contexts – not just the translation of the instructions, element set, and vocabularies, but also the standard phrases like “place of publication not identified”. The intent was to remove the AACR2 instruction of the type ‘give in English.’ Such statements are gone, replaced usually with an instruction to provide the data following the language, script, calendar, etc., preferred by the agency creating the data. There are over 60 such instructions in RDA – more evidence of internationalization.

RDA itself is available in multiple languages, with translations for German and French available since 2013, Spanish and Finnish in 2015, and Chinese and Italian underway. Texts in Portuguese, Croatian, Japanese, Arabic, and more will follow.

As noted before, the RDA element set and value vocabularies are available through the Open Metadata Registry (OMR) in anticipation of future uses in the international linked data environment. This registry provides terms and their definitions with a URI (Universal Resource Identifier) so that the translations of those terms can all be linked and the preferred language can be displayed. This shows more work towards internationalization.

Organizational structure to support RDA

There is a Committee of Principals (CoP), now renamed as of November 2015 to the RDA Board, who currently are the directors or their representatives from the British Library, the Library of Congress, the Library and Archives Canada, the National Library of Australia, and the Deutsche



Nationalbibliothek, and directors from the respective professional library associations, that is, the American Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). The composition of this group is expected to change to a new governance structure between 2015 through 2019.

There is also the group of publishers who manage the Funds (which is the money generated by sales of cataloguing instructions that supports the maintenance and development of the instructions). The co-publishers are at the American Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, and CILIP in the United Kingdom.

Then there is the Joint Steering Committee (JSC), renamed in November 2015 to the RDA Steering Committee (RSC), comprised of a chair, secretary, examples editor, and representatives currently from the constituent organizations. The members currently are: Gordon Dunsire, RSC Chair; Judy Kuhagen, RSC Secretary; Kate James, RDA Examples Editor; and the representatives: Kathy Glennan, American Library Association; Ebe Kartus, Australian Committee on Cataloguing; William Leonard, Canadian Committee on Cataloguing; Christine Frodl, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (representing German-speaking countries); David Reser, Library of Congress; and Alan Danskin, United Kingdom (British Library/CILIP). Further changes to the RSC composition will continue through 2019 reflecting the move to a regional representation for the RSC. The regions will be: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania.

According to Caroline Brazier, the former British Library representative on the Committee of Principals, the addition of the DNB representative to JSC recognized the substantial



commitment to RDA already made by DNB, which included preparation of the German translation. DNB also implemented RDA, which was one of the criteria that the CoP looked at when considering new members. In November 2015 the shift for both the RDA Board and the RSC to move to a regional representation approach will bring new challenges and opportunities for a truly global perspective.

Steering Committee Activities

The primary job of the Steering Committee (now the RSC) is to develop and maintain RDA content. This includes the instructions and examples in RDA, but also mappings the MARC formats. There is a link in RDA to the alignment with ISBD on the IFLA website (www.ifla.org). The RSC is also responsible for developing and maintaining the RDA Element Set and the various value vocabularies, including the lists of types of content, types of carriers, and so on.

Most of the members of the JSC were very actively involved in training – providing workshops and seminars on RDA around the world. For example, during 2012 and 2013, I gave RDA workshops and seminars in Taiwan, Malaysia, Mainland China, New Zealand, Iran (via the Web), Hawaii, Italy, and the Philippines, Turkey, and Japan. Other colleagues provided training in Latin America, Israel, Croatia, and more. We also did general presentations and maintained contact with national libraries and rule makers around the world, such as through meetings of the European RDA Interest Group (EURIG).

The RSC continues collaborations with various communities, like the publishers for updating the RDA/ONIX Framework, and ongoing work with the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) community as well as the International Standard



Bibliographic Data (ISBD) and FRBR Review Groups in IFLA, to assure interoperability of our standards. As noted before, there is active work with the music library community and renewed discussions with the law libraries, and rare book and archival communities.

The RSC also maintains a website, which contains news and announcements, recent proposals and discussion papers, the list of the members with contact information, and much more, including links to the archived JSC website with the various presentations, working documents, and archival documents.³ The RSC is eager to get suggestions and help from around the world to help improve RDA and to get the instructions more principle-based.

In the past we saw cataloguing as mostly constructing bibliographic descriptions with heading strings for access that were used in card catalogues and linear displays in OPACs. With RDA the focus has changed to describing resources – building the set of identifying characteristics and relationships that are important to meet the FRBR user tasks – find identify, select, obtain; and following the International Cataloguing Principles.

RDA itself is evolving, and there are several areas that were targeted where AACR2 had what were called ‘case law rules’, that is, situational-based rather than based on principles. As I noted before, there was no time to properly consult with the various communities before RDA was first released, so some of the AACR2 rules were carried forward as RDA instructions – but now that work continues particularly for music and law, with some work in recent years for religion.

³ Take a look at <http://www.rda-rsc.org>.



Since the publication of the RDA Toolkit in June 2010, many corrections and improvements have been made – so be cautious of using RDA guidelines published before 2012. For example, the April 2012 update included 175 “Fast Track” changes 48 Glossary additions and revisions, 17 proposals from the 2011 Glasgow JSC meeting, and rewording of the chapters 6, 9-11 of RDA (JSC-RDA, 2012). At the November 2012 JSC meeting in Chicago, 54 proposals and three discussion papers were considered with 43 proposals agreed to that appeared in 2013. By comparison, for the 2015 Edinburgh meeting, there were 39 formal proposals and discussion papers and about half of the proposals will result in changes to RDA in 2016. Meaningful change is going on.

The RSC’s goal is for RDA to help build well-formed metadata to describe resources through the perspective of the various FRBR entities and relationships. The process for making changes to RDA is continuing a formal proposal process through the RDA Steering Committee representatives for each constituency. For those constituencies not yet formally represented on the RSC, suggestions should be sent to the RSC Chair. Gordon Dunsire is the RSC Chair since 2014.

The RSC plans to continue having one annual face-to-face meeting. At those meetings, they discuss the proposals and the constituency responses to the proposals to reach agreement. Observers are welcome to attend the meeting, as space allows.

In addition to new content, major corrections to the RDA instructions are handled as proposals to the RDA Steering Committee. Corrections to examples now go to the RDA Examples Editor, who submits them for the next RDA release. However, simple corrections of errors, like typographical errors can either be done immediately for the next release (now four



times a year) or through a ‘Fast Track’ process where the RSC uses GoogleDocs to comment on the change. Those Fast Track changes that are approved go into the next RDA Toolkit release and others may be discussed during conference calls to resolve or to be assigned to a constituency to prepare a formal proposal.

Additionally, anyone finding errors in the RDA Toolkit itself, or anyone with questions about the RDA Toolkit or its functionality can use the online support feature to talk with ALA Publishing. There is a ‘support’ button (the “i” information icon) on the RDA Toolkit itself to submit corrections for errors or to make comments or ask questions about the RDA Toolkit and its functionality. Those suggestions go to ALA Publishing through that direct link within the RDA Toolkit online. The Toolkit is following the model of all software currently on the market by issuing enhancements that will enable it to remain a viable tool by rapidly improving its functionality in response to users’ needs.

When RDA was first launched and for several years after that, the Library of Congress offered a service for RDA content questions and in support of RDA users worldwide, at LChelp4rda@loc.gov. General questions continue to be answered by the Library of Congress Policy and Standards Division at their website: policy@loc.gov. We may find that similar services will emerge that would be language-based, but this has not yet been discussed. For any other questions, suggestions, or comments, everyone is welcome to write to the RSC Chair at RSCChair@rdatoolkit.org.

Conclusions

RDA was developed by international participants with feedback to drafts from around the world that greatly helped improve the results, and the work is ongoing. The RSC looks forward to



contributions as well as comments on proposals from everywhere. They want to assure that RDA continues to evolve to describe all types of entities and relationships in the bibliographic universe that meet the needs of users around the world.

Everyone can be part of the continuous improvement of this new cataloguing code, especially as you gain more experience using it. Librarians can also help their systems vendors to see that their systems evolve to better help you do your work, and very importantly, to help our users with better access to the rich resources we have to offer them.



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TILLET BARBARA B. is retired. She was Chief of the Policy & Standards Division at the Library of Congress for nearly 19 years before her retirement in December 2012.

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ABSTRACT: RDA was created in response to complaints about the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, especially the call for a more international, principle-based content standard that takes the perspective of the conceptual models of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data). The past and ongoing process for continuous improvement to RDA is through the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (known as the JSC, but recently renamed the RDA Steering Committee - RSC) to make RDA even more international and principle-based.

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