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Brian Dobreski, Syracuse University

Authority and Universalism: Conventional Values in Descriptive Catalog Codes

Abstract

Every standard embodies a particular set of values. Some aspects are privileged while others are masked. Values embedded within knowledge organization standards have special import in that they are further perpetuated by the data they are used to generate. Within libraries, descriptive catalog codes serve as prominent knowledge organization standards, guiding the creation of resource representations. Though the historical and functional aspects of these standards have received significant attention, less focus has been placed on the values associated with such codes. In this study, a critical, historical analysis of ten Anglo-American descriptive catalog codes and surrounding discourse was conducted as an initial step towards uncovering key values associated with this lineage of standards. Two values in particular were found to be highly significant: authority and universalism. Authority is closely tied to notions of power and control, particularly over practice or belief. Increasing control over resources, identities, and viewpoints are all manifestations of the value of authority within descriptive codes. Universalism has guided the widening coverage of descriptive codes in regards to settings and materials, such as the extension of bibliographic standards to non-book resources. Together, authority and universalism represent conventional values focused on facilitating orderly social exchanges. A comparative lack of emphasis on values concerning human welfare and empowerment may be unsurprising, but raises questions concerning the role of human values in knowledge organization standards. Further attention to the values associated with descriptive codes and other knowledge organization standards is important as libraries and other institutions seek to share their resource representation data more widely.

Introduction

Cataloging is the knowledge organization activity through which libraries create and maintain representations of information resources. Descriptive catalog codes, formal compilations of rules prescribing specific descriptive elements, guide this activity, and over the past 175 years, the Anglo-American descriptive cataloging tradition has been dominated by a relatively small number of codes. Though the historical and functional aspects of these standards have received significant attention, less focus has been placed on the values associated with such codes. Seen as enduring beliefs in preferable modes of conduct of states of existence (Rokeach 1968), values have been shown to be imbricated within standards in significant and influential ways (Bowker and Star, 2000; Lampland and Star, 2009). Values embedded within knowledge organization standards have special import: they are further perpetuated by the knowledge representation data these standards are used to generate. Through the use of linked data technologies, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions look towards an increasing dissemination and integration of their resource representations on the web. As data born from descriptive codes moves beyond the confines of the library catalog, it is increasingly important to understand the values it may be carrying with it as well as the implications for users.

Value analysis represents a systematic approach to revealing the presence and extent of underlying values within content (White 1951). As a research strategy it typically involves content analysis or critical analysis and has been applied to a variety of resources, usually in an attempt to determine an author's values (White 1949), the

values of fictional characters (Lester 1982), or the values associated with a resource itself (Spiggle 1986). Within library and information science, analyses of values frequently focus on professional statements of values (Shachaf 2005; Da Silva et al. 2015), leaving information standards in this area currently unexplored. There exists no single, *de facto* classification of values for use in value analysis, rather, value theorists and researchers have categorized values in a variety of ways (Rescher 1969). One such classification, derived from cognitive psychology, differentiates among three major types of values: human or moral values focused on well-being, conventional values that facilitate orderly social exchanges, and individual personal values (Smetana 1983; Turiel 1983). This general classification has been previously applied within information systems (Friedman 1997), and is similarly useful in approaching the library domain given its mixture of human and social elements. In fact, examination of library and information science has revealed the field's overarching emphasis on human values (Bates 1999; Gorman 2015; Koehler 2015). In exploring values associated with the cataloging profession, both Bair (2005) and Beghtol (2008) present a number of human values as well. However, as library knowledge organization standards, the extent to which descriptive catalog codes actually embody these asserted values is not fully understood.

In this study, I present the results of a critical, historical analysis of ten Anglo-American descriptive catalog codes and key surrounding discourse taken as an initial step toward uncovering influential values associated with this lineage of standards. In particular, two conventional values, authority and universalism, emerge as highly influential, and are discussed at length, along with further implications for descriptive codes and knowledge organization standards in general. These findings provide a starting point for further investigation into values and descriptive codes, offer new insight into knowledge organization standards and data, and contribute to the larger body of work on values and value analysis.

Method

Through consultation of foundational library knowledge organization texts (Joudrey et al. 2015; Chan and Salaba 2016), I identified ten prominent descriptive catalog codes used by Anglo-American libraries. Chronologically, codes ranged from Panizzi's *Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue* (1841) to *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) (Canadian Library Association et al., 2010). Functionally, through their successive adoption and replacement, these codes represent more of a lineage than a body of competing standards. The full list of codes consulted is presented in Table 1. In addition to the texts of these standards, I identified surrounding discourse in the form of contemporaneous secondary sources. These sources included significant works from the library and information science and knowledge organization literature that commented on a specific code, or descriptive codes in general. This literature was confined to the same time period as the consulted codes (1841 to present). The body of secondary sources consulted was not intended to be exhaustive, but rather exemplary, with efforts made to identify works of particular relevance or notability.

Table 1. Descriptive catalog codes consulted

Date	Title
1841	Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue
1852	On the Construction of Catalogues of Libraries
1876	Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue
1908	Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries (AA)
1941	ALA Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries
1949	Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress
1949	ALA Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries, 2nd Ed.
1967	Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR)
1978	Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd Ed. (AACR2)
2010	Resource Description and Access (RDA)

Through a process of close reading, the standards and secondary sources were subjected to a critical analysis (Griffin 2013); particular focus was given to passages denoting valuation (i.e. the preference of a mode or end state over another). I did not utilize a pre-established list of values in this study; instead, values were considered inductively in order to emphasize the most relevant, situational values over heuristically determined ones (Le Dantec et al. 2009). Values identified during the analysis were organized into the framework of human/moral values, conventional values, and individual values (Smetana 1983; Turiel 1983). However, due to the nature of the present study, individual values were not considered.

During analysis, little evidence of human values was uncovered. As such, I was unable to form these particular findings into a coherent structure at this time. However, many traces of conventional values were found. Through a process of collapsing and condensing, I arrived at two major conventional values: authority and universalism.

Authority

Integral to definitions of authority is the notion of power, particularly over practice or belief; authority has been described as "the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience" ("Authority, n." 2017). In his Theory of Basic Values, Schwartz explored the role of authority as a value, classifying it with other power values such as wealth and social esteem (Schwartz 2012). Schwartz's power values are generally concerned with control or dominance over people or resources, and emphasize the attainment of such a position within a specific social setting. In particular, authority represents a relational state characterized by socially institutionalized differences in power. Work in library and information science has explored the authoritative nature of libraries in relation to users, including its role as cognitive authority (Wilson 1983), trustworthy institution (McCathieNevile and Méndez 2007), and determinant of relevancy (Andersen and Skouvig 2006). However, authoritative relations also characterize knowledge organization work that occurs within libraries. In particular, knowledge organization standards such as descriptive codes are imbued with a type of authoritative power, designed to yield consistency and control. While an obvious connection between catalog codes and authority exists in the

procedural concept of authority control, a somewhat broader view must be taken. In exploring the role of authority as a guiding value for catalog codes, three broad expressions of power may be seen: expanding authority over viewpoints, over resources, and over identities.

The development and adoption of catalog code has worked to enforce an increasingly singular viewpoint concerning bibliographic entities and their representation. In creating his *On the Construction of Catalogues of Libraries* for the Smithsonian, Jewett (1852) aspired to set a national standard, and in order for catalogers at a variety of institutions to use the rules, he designed them in such a way as to minimalize individual judgment. Jewett's and other early codes achieved this in part due to heavy reliance on the resource itself, a practice that Cutter (1876) described as the "cult of the title page" (16) and that privileged the viewpoint of the resource producer (Dunkin 1969; Smiraglia 2009). This kind of legalistic approach (Osborn 1941) would wane through the progression of subsequent Anglo-American codes. The *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd Ed.* (AACR2) and its successor, *Resource Description and Access* (RDA), both allow important descriptive elements to be provided by external sources, including the web (Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of AACR 2005; Canadian Library Association et al. 2010). However, catalog codes now maintain authority over viewpoints in a more fundamental way. In creating *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR), IFLA sought to offer one model of the bibliographic universe (IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records 1998). This model is now heavily incorporated into RDA, and emerging standards such as BIBFRAME also rely on the adoption of an underlying conceptual model. Thus catalog codes and related standards are now imbued with greater ontological authority and work to provide an authorized view of the most basic aspects of descriptive practice.

Over time, catalog codes have functioned to provide increasing power and control over collections of resources. Strout (1956) observed that prior to Cutter, catalogs were seen primarily as a means to identify books, but with the introduction of his objects, Cutter strengthened the notion that catalogs were capable of more. Catalogs, enabled by well-structured and consistent rules, could allow users to skillfully exert command over a body of resources, accessing and utilizing information efficiently and effectively. Wilson (1968) addressed this in his *Two Kinds of Power*, writing: "To have bibliographic control over a collection of things is to have a certain sort of power over those things" (6). Since Cutter's time, catalog codes have been designed in a way to increasingly enable this kind of power. Through the use of more standardized and comprehensive catalog codes in the latter half of the twentieth century, it was hoped that universal bibliographic control would be achieved, a state in which libraries had bibliographic control over all published information resources worldwide (Kaltwasser 1972). Though this has yet to be realized, contemporary catalog codes such as AACR2 and RDA have been designed to enable control over a widening array of information resources through the provision of increasing amounts of descriptive elements. A related implication is that all things covered under these catalog codes are useful, valuable information resources. Andersen and Skouvig (2006) highlighted the power dynamic of library resource collection: in choosing resources, libraries choose what is relevant and valuable. A similar power dynamic may be found in resource description:

by determining what may be described, catalog codes have the power to legitimize objects as information resources under the purview of the library.

Finally, descriptive codes have been designed to guide the construction and management of records for authors and other agents associated with bibliographic resources. This process, known as authority control, facilitates access to bibliographic descriptions by authorizing preferred forms of names for persons, as well as organizations and families. In addressing this, the earliest codes provided moderate guidance but invoked little regard for a person's own name preference (Jewett 1852; Cutter 1876). Modern standards such as AACR2 or RDA provide more extensive rules on determining preferred names for persons, relying more explicitly on literary warrant and common usage. However, in both codes, other additions must be made to distinguish among persons with the same name, including dates, additional names, or titles. The resulting name may thus differ significantly from the form of name a person uses. The practice of labelling a person with a name they do not publicly use in order to facilitate authority control has been raised as an ethical issue by a number by a number of critics, including Lubetzky (1953) and Olson (2001). This practice has only grown more problematic under RDA. The inclusion and treatment of new elements such as gender (Billey et al. 2014; Thompson 2016) have the potential to provoke further conflict with personal self-identifications. RDA authorizes catalogers to record more personal information than ever before, shifting the focus from names and empowering catalogers and the library as arbiters of identity.

Universalism

Universalism, or the state of applicability or truth across all contexts or cases, relies upon "the insistence that any principle, rule, standard, or law should hold in every instance to which it is applicable" (Berleant 1998, 69). As a value, universalism is also included among the ten major values in Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz 2012). Here, Schwartz interprets universalism with a more humanistic tone, referring to the preference for general inclusiveness and tolerance, and grouping it with other self-transcendent values. Common to these varying interpretations of universalism are a sense of objectivity and a preference for consistency over relativism. Within library and information science, universalism can be seen as the drive toward broadly and consistently applicable principles, standards, and workflows, and has been described as a significant component of the field at an epistemological level (Budd 1995). Specifically regarding knowledge organization standards, Hoffman (2009) noted that catalog codes have developed over time to be more universal, as opposed to catering to specific contexts. This preference is indeed apparent in reviewing the major Anglo-American descriptive catalog codes, to such an extent that universalism can be interpreted as a significant guiding value. This valuation of universalism can be seen in the trend toward comprehensiveness, both within the domain of libraries and traditional library materials, and ultimately beyond.

The earliest descriptive codes were designed for the collections and needs of a single library or institution. For instance, Panizzi was tasked with establishing cataloging rules specifically for the British Museum's collection of books. The resulting 1841 *Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue* presents a set of 91 rules tailored explicitly

to the British Museum, referencing materials common to the museum such as sermons and almanacs (Panizzi 1841). Similarly, Jewett's *On the Construction of Catalogues of Libraries* was intended to guide the description of books in the Smithsonian collections; however, Jewett had clear aspirations that other libraries around the country would utilize these rules as well (Jewett 1852). As the nineteenth century progressed, an interest in broader, more generally applicable knowledge organization systems was increasing (Svenonius 2000). This can be seen in Cutter's 1876 *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue*. Writing not for a specific library, but rather at the behest of the United States Bureau of Education, Cutter sought to produce a set of rules applicable to a wide range of American libraries, attempting to accommodate for differences by providing several levels of catalog fullness.

By the start of the twentieth century, the era of the single library descriptive codes had come to a close and a new era of increasing scope was beginning. Created in 1908 through the cooperation of American and British library associations, the *Anglo-American Catalog Rules* sought to unify descriptive practice among libraries in a number of English-speaking countries. Unfortunately, further international cooperation on descriptive codes would be set back by the outbreak of World War II (Tikku 1983), and the follow up to the 1908 *Rules* would be published solely for American libraries by the American Library Association in 1941. The harmonization of descriptive practice at an international level was revisited in 1961 when IFLA convened the Conference on Cataloging Principles. The end result was the issuance of the Paris Principles, a statement intended to promote further consistency among cataloging rules, with 53 countries agreeing to work towards revising their national codes accordingly (Joudrey et al. 2015). For American and British libraries, the incorporation of the Paris Principles would take place in the next joint code development, the 1967 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR). Aside from attempting to cover the needs of all libraries in the United States and the United Kingdom, AACR included, for the first time in a major descriptive code, rules covering the description of non-book materials. The Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd Ed (AACR2), continued this pursuit of uniformity among a greater number of libraries and a greater amount of materials.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, descriptive cataloging would enter an era characterized by the strongest push towards universally applicable standards yet. AACR2's successor, *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) represents an attempt at the widest-reaching descriptive standard ever devised. For the first time, a descriptive catalog code has been designed with the intent of adoption among both English and non-English speaking countries. The text of RDA has been translated into Chinese, Finnish, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and has been adopted or tested by a number of non-English libraries (Poulter 2012). As a descriptive standard, RDA has also been designed to more greatly appeal to institutions beyond the library domain. Whereas introductory matter for AACR2 explicitly mentions libraries (Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of AACR 2005), the initial purpose and scope passage for RDA notably refrains from the use of this term, instead using the more inclusive "agencies organizing resources" (Canadian Library Association et al. 2010). Finally, RDA attempts to extend coverage even further beyond the traditional domain of books than its predecessors. While AACR offered rules covering six non-book formats, and AACR2 increased this number to ten, RDA covers 23 different content types, including

cartographic datasets, notated movement, and three-dimensional moving images. Under RDA, more institutions and materials are united under the same descriptive code than ever before.

Values in Descriptive Standards

Authority and universalism can be seen as conventional values, facilitating the functioning of social interactions. Their importance in descriptive catalog codes is reasonable considering that knowledge representation and access can be seen as a highly structured social activity. By placing value on authority, descriptive codes support accuracy and precision in fulfillment of users' information requests. The privileging of universalism has promoted uniformity and interoperability in data among a large number of institutions. Together, authority and universalism work to effect consistency, and ultimately, access; as such, the degree to which these values are terminal (desirable end states in and of themselves) or simply instrumental (useful modes of conduct toward other ends) (Orsi 2015) is yet unclear. Authority and universalism may not be the only ways of achieving access though, and it is also worth considering what is lost when authoritative and universal modes or states are privileged. Under systems of authority control, the library's propagation of a preferred form of name may deprive persons of the authority to control their identities (Olson 2001). Similarly, the institution of broad, bibliographic models and ontologies may pose challenges for library data existing alongside alternative conceptions of the bibliographic universe (Dunsire et al. 2012) or work to override users' perspectives (Shirky 2005). Universalist solutions have faced criticism within the knowledge organization community, particularly in contrast with more specialized alternatives (Schmierer 1989; Hoffman 2009). Smiraglia's (2009) exploration of the bibliocentric nature of cataloging standards and the ensuing potentials for resource misrepresentation is especially applicable.

In contrast to the strong representation of conventional values, fewer traces of human values were found. Human or moral values are concerned with human well-being; examples of human values of interest in the information domain include privacy and autonomy (Friedman 1996). The lack of emphasis on human values within descriptive catalog codes may at first appear unsurprising. However, human values have long been considered essential to library and information science (Bates 1999; Gorman 2015; Koehler 2015), making their relative absence in crucial domain standards more curious. In their statement of the core values associated with librarianship, the American Library Association, publisher of numerous catalog codes, presents a list unquestionably dominated by human values such as privacy, diversity, and intellectual freedom (American Library Association 2004). The applicability of this list to cataloging work has been questioned though (Shoemaker 2015), and the apparent mismatching of asserted institutional values with those embedded in key artifacts raises a number of questions. What is the role of human values such as privacy, autonomy, and intellectual freedom in descriptive catalog codes? What role does knowledge organization play in supporting the humanistic goals of the library? What would a more humanistic descriptive standard look like? Further exploration of how human values

manifest in descriptive catalog codes and other knowledge organization standards, as well as the implications of their presence or absence, is warranted.

As the product of descriptive catalog codes and practices, resource representation data is traditionally confronted in the context of the library catalog. However, new approaches in data publishing and dissemination, in line with linked data and other Semantic Web technologies, promise to take library data beyond the confines of the catalog. These advances promise new and exciting uses of descriptive data, but may serve to decontextualize or obscure its origins. What are the implications of transporting data born from descriptive catalog code's particular value system to new and unexpected settings and users? Value sensitive design is one perspective that may be useful in confronting this question. Originally advanced as a methodological framework for upholding key values during technology design (Friedman 1996), value sensitive design approaches have grown to encompass value discovery and analysis as well (Le Dantec et al. 2009). Understanding values associated with technologies and standards, as well as their users, can enable the design and presentation of resource descriptions better aligned with desired institutional and community values. Benefitting from value sensitive design or other such approaches here first requires further investigation into the values associated with descriptive standards and data, as well as how values are embedded in knowledge organization standards in general.

Conclusion

Descriptive catalog codes serve as prominent knowledge organizing standards in the library domain. Over the past 175 years, Anglo-American cataloging has been guided by a lineage of a small number of prominent codes. As with any standards, descriptive catalog codes have the potential to harbor values embedded within them. In this critical, historical analysis, the conventional values of authority and universalism were found to be particularly influential. The comparative lack of emphasis on human values is worth noting, especially considering the role of human values in the broader domain of library and information science. Further investigation is required to understand how values manifest in catalog codes, as well as the presence and roles of both conventional and human values in knowledge organization standards at large. The values imbricated in catalog codes and the resulting descriptive data have bearing on the broader, online information environment beyond the catalog as libraries look to share and combine their resource representation data through linked data strategies. Continuing attention to values in the design of such data, as well as associated systems and interfaces, is needed.

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