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Guest Editorial

Implementing AACR and AACR2: A Personal Perspective and Lessons Learned

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As we move toward implementing *RDA: Resource Description and Access*, I have been pondering how we might manage the transition to new cataloging rules effectively. I was a practicing cataloger when *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed., was implemented and remember it as a traumatic process. The published literature that I found focused on the impact of the then-new rules on specific formats and genres, but no one seems to have addressed the process of implementation and what type of training worked well (or did not). After a bit of sleuthing, I found a pertinent presentation by Arlene G. Taylor, which she graciously agreed to repurpose as this guest editorial.—Peggy Johnson

Implementation of AACR

I was in library school at the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign studying for a Master in Library Science in 1965–66. Kathryn Henderson was my cataloging professor. She was a consultant (representing the American Theological Library Association) to the committee making the new rules (to be called *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* or *AACR*), so she had access to the drafts.¹ She taught the new rules to our class, but I do not believe she concentrated on details. Rather she taught us the principles, and what I remember specifically learning is the “Paris Principles.” I contacted her to ask for her input for this reminiscence. She wrote, “I served for 4 years as a consultant and attended meetings, including finding on our chairs one day during one of the sessions that LC would institute something called superimposition. It was a bolt out of the blue and there was much discussion.”²

My first position out of library school was as a cataloger at the Library of Congress (LC) from June 1966 to September 1967. The implementation of AACR occurred March 20, 1967, according to the policy outlined in the LC’s *Cataloging Service*, bulletin 79: “60 days after the date of publication . . . a period that will be sufficient for card subscribers to procure copies of the rules and for their catalogers as well as the catalogers at the Library of Congress to become fully acquainted with the provisions of the rules and their relation to existing catalog entries.”³ Bulletin 79 also announced the policy of superimposition, and bulletin 80 (April 1967), gave more detailed information about how the LC “intends to apply the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* to new cataloging.”⁴

I do not remember having much training at the LC in preparation for the changeover. We had a lecture one afternoon on the differences between the American Library Association (ALA) rules and AACR. It is possible that I was so low in the hierarchy that my supervisor was to revise all my work and teach me as we went along; although I do remember that about ten months after I started at the LC, I was assigned as a reviser of new catalogers. That would have been around April 1967; AACR was implemented March 20, 1967, so I was expected to know enough AACR to teach and revise someone else. Also, the rules for description in AACR had been essentially lifted from the LC's *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging* and its revisions, which had been in use since 1949, so there was relatively little change in rules for description.⁵ The major changes affected access points.

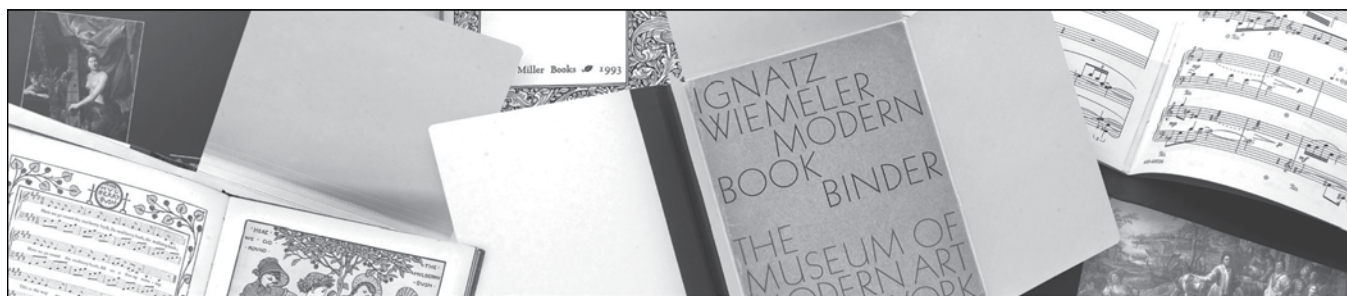
Because of superimposition, we were led to believe that most cataloging would be the same for a long time, and only as we needed to establish new headings would we need to learn the new rules for entry and heading form.⁶ The policy of superimposition did, in fact, mean that very often we simply used already-established heading forms. However, the result was not helpful for users, especially after 1974 when the exception for entry of educational institutions under place was dropped from AACR. Users could not understand,

for example, why some universities were entered under place (e.g., "Illinois. University at Urbana-Champaign," the superimposed ALA form of the heading) while others were entered under the name of the university in the order that the name appeared in its corporate form (e.g., "University of Tennessee at Chattanooga," the new name taken by the university and the heading established after the exception for entry of educational institutions under place was dropped).

I taught cataloging at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science from spring 1971 through summer 1972. I taught AACR but told students about older rules. I always included history of cataloging and cataloging rules because catalogs would always contain legacy data that librarians would need to explain to users.

Implementation of *ISBD*

Implementation of *International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD)* followed in 1974, when I was head of copy cataloging at Iowa State University.⁷ I taught workshops on *ISBD*. I also taught again in the library school of the University of Illinois in the summer of 1974. A better comparison to what is happening now might be when *ISBD* began to be



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used for AACR description (i.e., the separate publication of *AACR Chapter 6*, for monographs).⁸ At that time serials and other formats were to continue to have elements ordered and punctuated the old way, and monographs were to use the *ISBD* order of elements and *ISBD* punctuation. Libraries switched over at different rates. A number of heads of cataloging insisted that copy catalogers had to make corrections to old records using old rules for order and punctuation and make corrections to new records using *ISBD*. This was extremely difficult to teach. It was one thing for people who had been doing it the old way for years to remember which way was old and which was new. But for those learning it all for the first time, keeping the different rules straight in their minds was impossible. Also, students were supposed to learn the old order and punctuation for anything other than monographs. I tried to teach both for a couple of years, but finally I just taught *ISBD* and hoped that the students who would have jobs that required the old order and punctuation would be able to learn that on the job. I always told students, however, that lots of records that look different were already in catalogs, and I provided students with handouts showing old cataloging that had used older rules.

Implementation of AACR2

Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd ed. (AACR2), was published in 1978, but implementation was first postponed to 1980, then to 1981.⁹ My 1981 PhD dissertation, based on research carried out in 1979 and 1980, was titled “A Five-Year Projection of the Impact of the Rules for Form of Heading in the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition, upon Selected Academic Library Catalogs.”¹⁰ A friend had a t-shirt made for me (see figures 1 and 2) that shows the struggle: “AACR II in 1980” with “80” crossed out and replaced by “81,” and the back read “no superimposition.”

I was invited to speak about my dissertation research at the 1980 ALA Annual Conference in New York. Berry’s editorial in *Library Journal* before that meeting stated that the most important thing that should be accomplished at that conference was to postpone, again, the implementation of AACR2.¹¹ I gave my report to a standing-room-only crowd, essentially showing that implementation would not be as big a problem as many people were saying, especially if libraries did not start new catalogs but just integrated the new cataloging into existing catalogs as materials that would need the new headings were acquired. Because most libraries still had card catalogs, I recommended deciding on a number of cards already in the catalog that could be changed if a heading required being changed (e.g., if fewer than six cards, then the headings could be changed and refiled). Many of these changes required only minor modifications, such as

removing a comma and adding parentheses (e.g., the change from “Durham, N.C.” to “Durham (N.C.)”). For changes with more than the chosen number of cards already in the catalog, I recommended two possible solutions: (1) interfiling headings for a change that was so small that it would hardly be noticeable if interfiled (e.g., the change from “Chicago” to “Chicago (Ill.)”); and (2) using “see also” references for more significant changes (e.g., the change from “Little, Malcolm, 1925–1965” to “Malcolm X, 1925–1965”). I projected that if these techniques were followed, and if libraries only dealt with changes as they acquired materials with changed headings (e.g., if they did not change “Samuel Clemens” to “Mark Twain” until they acquired something needing “Mark Twain” as a heading), then during the first year the heading conflict rate in the large, medium-size, and small libraries in my study would be 3.6 percent, 2.9 percent, and 0.5 percent, respectively. Percentages of conflict would be reduced from the first-year amount in each of the next four years.

The reports about my presentation published afterward in *Library Journal* (*LJ*) and in *American Libraries* sounded as if the reporters had attended the presentations of two different speakers.¹² The *LJ* report misrepresented what I had said and gave several misstatements of fact. *LJ* did publish (four months later) a letter of corrections from me and another one written by Michael Gorman and William Gray Potter.¹³ The last paragraph of my letter stated,

Lastly, the report implied that I “conceded” that libraries should open catalogs in new formats because of AACR 2. I did not. There are many reasons for working toward machine-readable catalogs as quickly as possible, but AACR 2 itself is not a convincing reason. The furor over AACR 2 is a symptom of a deeper illness. Even without new rules, catalogs are in constant need of changes in headings because people and corporate bodies change. Yet the need for authority control was not recognized until we faced making a few more changes than usual because of a new set of cataloging rules that merely represent the next step in a continuum of progress toward better catalog access.¹⁴

The last paragraph of Gorman and Potter’s letter stated, “We know that the flurry of a conference can lead to hasty summaries. We believe, however, that Arlene’s paper was inherently valuable and of interest to a great many people. It deserved to be summarized correctly even though it did not support *LJ*’s editorial view.”¹⁵

My dissertation was published as a book, *AACR 2 Headings: A Five-Year Projection of Their Impact on Libraries*.¹⁶ A follow-up article, coauthored with Barbara Paff, used data collected during the first three years of implementation of



Figure 1. AACR2 T-shirt Front



Figure 2. AACR2 T-shirt Back

AACR2, in a library of comparable size to the medium-size library in my dissertation study, to show that my projection had been right on track.¹⁷

I served as a member of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services Cataloging and Classification Section Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) during the implementation of AACR2, which began January 1, 1981. Much more training was provided than with AACR, and I made several presentations at pre-conferences and workshops. Many people could not afford to travel to centralized workshops, however, so materials were sold to folks willing and able to pay.

I also was teaching (at the University of Chicago Graduate Library School) during the transition to AACR2. This transition was different from the current change to *RDA: Resource Description and Access (RDA)* because, with AACR2, the presentation of data did not change for monographs (i.e., everyone was still going to use *ISBD* for the way description would look, and almost everyone still had card catalogs, although many were printing cards from data entered into the MARC format).¹⁸ The content of the descriptive elements changed a little in some instances and the rules for constructing the forms of some names and titles changed a lot. So I could to continue teaching cataloging of monographs the same way and just explain the different content and name forms. Teaching of serials and audiovisual cataloging actually became easier, because all formats were described with *ISBD* order and punctuation when using AACR2.

Again, teaching both old rules and new rules at the same time to students new to it all was difficult. Learning the new rules is different for someone ingrained in old rules. They can, for a time, although usually not for more than a couple of years, remember what is new versus what they have been doing for years.

Lessons That May Be Learned from Previous Implementations of New Cataloging Rules

Recognize that change is difficult. Henderson wrote to me: “It was a valuable experience to have been present at the last four years of the code revision in the 1960s. I learned much about the politics of code revision. I can well remember revision members from large institutions like Yale standing up and saying ‘We will *not* change our catalogs to the new forms.’ Of course that was in the days of card catalogs, but I don’t know if it is really any easier to change them today. Change always comes hard.”¹⁹

Do research into the potential impact of the rule changes—and if the research method is sound, believe the results! If someone reports the presentation of the research findings incorrectly, now it can be refuted immediately on the Internet, which was not the case in either 1967 or 1981.

Concentrate on *principles* for both old and new—do not expect people new to cataloging rules to remember the *details* of old rules versus new rules. Henderson spoke to this point: “Students used to tell me that when a new code

came out their colleagues would ask them why they were so confident in using it and they would reply that they had learned principles in their cataloging class which they could apply in any situation.”²⁰

Teach students that there are differences in sets of rules, but do not try to teach them all the details. Even if students are convinced they will never catalog, anyone dealing with catalogs (reference librarians, acquisitions librarians, etc., as well as catalogers) will be dealing with records created over time using different rules.

Current catalogers need to know what is going to be different in how they prepare records and organize a catalog. Current students, on the other hand, need to know principles and the general elements of a record, along with how authority control pulls records together into a catalog.

Share teaching materials widely. Hold workshops. Schools of library and information science and larger libraries have the facilities to do this. Most schools and many libraries now have the means to teach online, which would be a boon to folks who cannot afford to travel to centralized workshop locations such as ALA pre-conferences. Much more than one afternoon of training is needed!

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6. Superimposition is the cataloging principle that only headings created *after* new rules take effect need to conform to the changes mandated in the new rules. This makes changing headings processed under the old rules unnecessary.
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