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Bibliographic Control Alphabet Soup: Webinar Report

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Acronyms:

AACR=Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules
ALCTS=Association for Library Collections and Technical Services
DCMI=Dublin Core Metadata Initiative
FRBR=Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records
GMD=General Material Designator
ILS=Integrated Library System
MARC=MAchine-Readable Cataloging
NISO=National Information Standards Organization
ONIX=ONline Information eXchange
RDA=Resource Description and Access
VIAF=Virtual International Authority File

"Bibliographic Control Alphabet Soup: AACR to RDA and Evolution of MARC" was the title of a 90-minute webinar sponsored by National Information Standards Organization (NISO) on October 14, 2009. The University at Buffalo (UB) Law Library purchased access and opened it to all library staff at UB, of which approximately 18 attended and filled the room.

Karen Wetzel (NISO Standards Program Manager) commented that there was a very high level of interest in this program as evidenced by the large number of registrants. She then proceeded to introduce the speakers.

Barbara Tillett (Chief, Policy and Standards Division, Library of Congress)

Dr. Tillett's presentation was called "AACR2, RDA, VIAF, and the Future (From There to Here to There)." Her first slide explained the subtitle as follows:

- There = Past cataloging rules and cataloging environments
- Here = Bridge period with transition to new approach
- There = Future views of cataloging data and re-use of that data

She began with a brief review of the Anglo-American tradition of cataloging rules, including the 1969 establishment of the MARC formats and ISBD and the 1978 introduction of AACR2, which gave rise to online catalogs. Now we are facing RDA, a web-based tool aiming to incorporate FRBR principles into the cataloging rules. The structure of RDA changed from AACR2's with the goal of simplified transcription. AACR2's "rule of three" will become optional. General material designators (GMDs) will be replaced with content type, media type, and carrier type data which could be represented in the form of icons in catalog displays. This is one of the aspects intended to permit the re-use of existing data captured by other providers, such as ONIX data created by publishers.

The goal is to guide users to the rich resources available in our collections and to make the relationships between those resources more evident. Dr. Tillett characterized the bibliographic universe as rich and interconnected. Metadata has value beyond one library. Our catalogs can no longer exist in isolation, but must become an integral part of the wider Internet environment. This includes the use of more controlled vocabularies, which is where VIAF comes into play by providing context-appropriate name authority displays in different languages. All of which is intended to help us negotiate this "bridge" period when RDA is implemented and next generation ILSs are developed. The period of testing of RDA in 2010 was mentioned only briefly and the assumption seemed to be that the test results would be positive and it would indeed be implemented.

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Diane Hillmann (Director of Metadata Initiatives, Information Institute of Syracuse)

"RDA Elements & Vocabularies" was the title of Ms. Hillmann's portion of the program. While Dr. Tillett had only said in passing that we will move beyond MARC, Ms. Hillmann's first slide had the caption "Why Not MARC?" She explained that the exclusive use of MARC by libraries limits us in exchanging data with other communities, all of which are now focused on metadata. The repurposing of data is essential in today's cataloging environment, but MARC is an impediment to moving forward since it is organized around records, rather than more agile data packets.

At this point, Ms. Hillmann turned to a more technical discussion of her work with the DCMI/RDA Task Group which "would build the formal representation of the elements and vocabularies and set up an Application Profile." She acknowledged the difficulties presented by starting their work while the text of RDA was still in flux. But since cataloging rules are never totally "done" this also serves as an advantage by positioning libraries to move ahead quickly once RDA implementation is underway. In conclusion, she opined that "MARC will be with us for many more years [but] not as the lynchpin of our data strategy."

William Moen (Associate Professor, School of Library and Information Sciences, University of North Texas)

"Data-Driven Evidence for Core MARC Records" was the title of Dr. Moen's presentation. He gave a detailed account of the research project he conducted in 2005-2007 in which he examined over 56 million OCLC records, with the intent of capturing data on the usage level of the various MARC tags by practicing catalogers. The goal was simply to record use of the MARC structure, not to examine the quality of the cataloging data. As might be expected, the findings showed that a small number of MARC fields were used frequently, while many other MARC fields were rarely used. Dr. Moen expressed the importance of knowing what catalogers actually do before proposing to make any changes in their activities. He actually ended up by posing a lot of questions that need to be addressed:

- What is needed in a bibliographic record to support FRBR?
- What should we train catalogers to do?
- Can we defend our current practice?
- Can we streamline our current practice?

Q&A: Some of the questions and answers were recorded and are available on the web, although the ones directed to Dr. Moen seem not to be there. Many of the questions reflected the discomfort catalogers are feeling as they face major upheavals associated with the implementation of RDA and the eventual phase-out of the MARC format. Yet the "answers" revealed that little is known about what exactly will happen and when over the course of the next few years.

Here is the website with event slides and Q&A:
http://www.niso.org/news/events/2009/bibcontrol09/

On October 27, 2009, I viewed a related webinar, this one was sponsored by OCLC and entitled "RDA and OCLC." Unfortunately, I did not feel this session added too much more information to the uncertainty already swirling around this topic. Here is what I did learn:

- OCLC's contract cataloging operation will participate in RDA testing.
- OCLC will accommodate data created under both sets of rules.
- OCLC will participate in training delivered by ALCTS.

Stay tuned as developments continue …