

## AACR 2 as Viewed by a Public Services Librarian of a Research Library in Mid-1980

*Bessie K. Hahn\**

There is no doubt that Mr. Ben Tucker and his colleagues at the Library of Congress have invested a large amount of time and energy on the task of interpreting AACR 2 for the rest of the library community. I wish I could be supportive of and thankful for their efforts. Instead, the more I learn about AACR 2 and L.C.'s interpretations of the code, the more I question the value of adopting AACR 2 in 1981 and beyond. My reactions to AACR 2 parallel the sentiments expressed by Ayres on filing rules:

First they have pointed out the need for simplifying the rules so that the library user can find his way more readily. They have then set about complicating the rules to such an extent that the librarians themselves cannot understand the complexities that result. (1, p.3)

Since I am a public services librarian and also part of library administration in a research library, my natural inclination is to judge the mandated adoption and implementation of AACR 2 on two fronts: whether our library users and our public services staff will find the resulting catalog easier to use; and whether the derived benefits justify the cost of implementation at this time.

Malinconico suggested that the basic functions of the catalog have not altered since the time of Charles Cutter; indeed they have been re-endorsed after a century of experience for the modern-day computerized environment. These functions include providing access to a particular publication through its author, title and subject; relating various works (and the various editions and translations of these works) of a given author; and determining what the library owns on a particular subject.<sup>2</sup> In other words, library

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\*Bessie K. Hahn is Assistant Director for Public Services, Eisenhower Library, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

users still expect the catalog — no matter what formats it may take in the future — to provide them with information on location, authorship and how the library's collection is organized (the concept of collocation).

According to some critics, rule changes made by AACR 2 governing the choice of forms for personal names, pseudonyms, predominant names and, in particular, corporate names will partially destroy the benefits of collocation and the concept of authorship: the *raison d'être* for the catalog!<sup>3</sup> Therefore, upon adoption, AACR2 is expected to bring additional inconsistencies and confusion to existing catalogs.

In academic institutions, an influential portion of our users is competing with the library for limited resources: for increases in faculty salary, upgrading of laboratory equipment, bringing graduate students' stipends to competitive levels with other institutions, hiring prestigious faculty, etc. The library is under pressure to justify every dollar it spends. As a public services librarian, I will be asked of the rationale behind the adoption of AACR2. What are the advantages? What is the cost? Are there other alternatives? Why are we spending money to "improve" a catalog if we are planning to replace it with an on-line catalog?

Since we are unable to demonstrate to our users and our staff that the changes will appreciably improve the usefulness of our catalog or shorten the research time of the user, we cannot rationally justify the expenses involved in implementing AACR2 in 1981, and from our inability to justify the expenditures involved. The only argument we can offer for implementing the changes is: if we do not follow LC's practices, it will cost us more to do original cataloging, and our records will become incompatible with those of other research collections, thus jeopardizing our participation in future resource sharing programs.

It is apparent that I am not at all convinced of the value of implementing AACR2. But I am also realistic enough to recognize the cold facts of life. Therefore, even though we will continue to question the soundness of LC's decision, we will nevertheless make ample preparations for its coming in order to minimize any adverse effects on our users and our public services staff.

Preparing users for the changes brought about by AACR2 will

require a different strategy from that used to prepare public services staff. As non-librarians, the users are not interested in the theoretical construct of our catalogs. Code revision and desuperimposition, like many other issues in the library world, should not be expected to impress them. They just want their information in the quickest and most efficient way. Therefore, preparing the user will have to take a more subtle or unobtrusive strategy, namely, they should be as little aware of the change as possible. On the other hand, maximum transfer of knowledge and shared decision-making should be used for preparing the staff.

How would we go about making the users be as little aware of the changes as possible? At Hopkins, we will first recommend that the new records cataloged under AACR2 be incorporated into the existing card catalog, that is, we recommend that the library should have only one manual catalog. One frequent user complaint about the card catalogs in large libraries is the need to consult more than one catalog. Oftentimes these separate catalogs also have different systems of call numbers or filing rules. Some of us who had used those libraries in the early 60's (when they were reclassifying from Dewey or an in-house system to LC) would remember how time-consuming and confusing it was to have to look up in two or more catalogs with different rules.

Secondly, we do not believe that we can let our manual catalogs become more confusing than they are already. We know that an alternative to the manual catalog, such as an on-line catalog, has to become a reality in the near future. But we are also aware that an on-line catalog at Hopkins will only be of limited use to scholars initially, since its data base will not contain all the library's holdings. Given the high cost of comprehensive retrospective conversion, it is safe to say that our scholars will be using our manual catalogs for many years to come even with the availability of an on-line system. We therefore recommend that inconsistencies and contradictions in our manual catalogs be held to the minimum. This can be achieved by *not* short-cutting on catalog maintenance and desuperimposition. I will not go into the details of how desuperimposition should be done, but I do wish to stress that split files only frustrate a user because the person is asked to look up information in two or more places. When files are combined under a

heading, I would urge the catalogers to have less concern for cosmetic neatness: for example, records with the old heading of "New York. Museum of Modern Art" should not be interfiled with other records under the new heading "Museum of Modern Art" until the words "New York" have been blacked out or erased.

After making sure that the changes are not too apparent, the public services should incorporate into their bibliographic instruction programs and faculty workshops some explanation of the new forms of entry or alert them to the major road-blocks in using the catalog. Research has shown that very few users are motivated to learn cataloging or filing rules. They believe that as long as they know the alphabet, they will be able to find their way through the card catalog. Therefore, the incorporation of such knowledge into the instruction programs has to be subtly done. But the need cannot be over-emphasized and the effort must be made.

As I mentioned earlier, preparing the staff for the change will have to take a different strategy. It will have to be a strategy of changing attitudes and habits by maximum influx of knowledge through education. The public services staff will need the technical services staff to educate them on the general policies and specific examples of AACR2 as LC continues to interpret it for the library world. In-house workshops should be organized, covering topics such as the history of cataloging, the major differences between ALA, AACR1 and AACR2 rules, the decision to superimpose and the later decision to desuperimpose, and how AACR2 will affect the access points in the catalog. Staff involvement in deciding what will be the best for our readers will also lead to increased awareness and knowledge among a large segment of the library staff. In turn the interactions can strengthen the relationship between the technical and public services staff during a period of dramatic change.

Workshops for the public services staff should take place before January, 1981. After January 1981, the staff should be continuously alerted to specific changes being introduced. It is embarrassing for a public services staff member to approach the catalog with a user in tow, in search of a familiar heading, only to find that the heading is gone, and worse yet, that there is no linkage to clue the person as to where to look next.

The public services staff should also be aware of increased

workload. When the New York Public Library closed its card catalogs and introduced book catalogs, the reference work-load increased by 20%. Users will need more guidance at the catalog after we implement AACR2. The public services staff will need all the technical and interpersonal skills in their reserve to assist disgruntled users with tact and empathy.

At a workshop on superimposition held at the University of British Columbia in 1967, the general feeling of the participants was that, due to the economy of using Library of Congress cataloging data and the need for data uniformity to facilitate resource sharing, they had to follow L.C.'s decision to superimpose and "somehow muddle through".<sup>4</sup> After a decade, the policy of superimposition has proven to be costly and vexing. History is definitely being repeated with AACR 2: libraries are again gearing themselves to somehow muddle through another L.C. decision which many of us do not support but have to live with for years to come. Mr. Tucker and his colleagues have good reasons to believe that we cannot postpone the implementation of AACR 2 indefinitely at this late date, and to feel annoyed by those of us who are still "agitating" to reverse the decision. It must be remembered, however, that throughout the ages, prophets have never been known to be popular among their own. But for the sake of the profession's credibility among our providers and users, we feel it is our responsibility to continue crying out in the wilderness, hoping that, in the future, L.C. will make decisions which are beneficial not only to its own operations, but also to those of other libraries.

### References

1. Ayres, Fred H., "It's not as easy as ABC", *Catalogue & Index; Periodical of the Library Association Cataloguing and Indexing Group*, No. 54, August, 1979, p. 1-3, 8.
2. Malinconico, S. Michael, "The Library catalog in a computerized environment", *Wilson Library Bulletin*, September, 1976, p. 53-64.
3. See the following articles on the subject:
  - (a) Ayres, Fred H., "The Code, the catalog, and the computer", *Library Journal*, April 1, 1980, p. 775-780.
  - (b) Richmond, Phyllis A., "AACR 2—a review article", *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 6(1): 30-37, March, 1980.

- (c) Fasana, Paul J., "1981 and beyond: visions and decisions", *Journal of Library Automation*, 13(2): 96-107.
  - (d) Spalding, C. Summer, "The Life and death (?) of corporate authorship", *Library Resources & Technical Services*, Summer, 1980, p. 195-208.
  - (e) The entire issue of the *Alternative Catalog Newsletter*, No. 21, June, 1980, is devoted to the controversy over the scheduled adoption of AACR2 in 1981.
4. *New rules for an old game: proceedings of a workshop on the 1967 Anglo-American Cataloging Code held by the School of Librarianship, the University of British Columbia, April 13 and 14, 1967.* Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1967.