Feature

Resource Description and Access (RDA) and New Research Potentials

by Shawne D. Miksa

Resource Description and Access (RDA) [1], set to be released in the third quarter of 2009, is a new set of descriptive cataloging rules developed to replace the longstanding Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2 (AACR2) [2], first released in 1978. The principal goal of the new rules is to facilitate resource discovery through library catalogs in a more consistent and powerful way than is currently possible with AACR2. To understand this new rule set, it is necessary to understand the critical concepts found within *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) [3] and *Functional Requirements for Authority Data* (FRAD) [4], two publications developed through International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) that are used to form the backbone of the RDA.

The change in cataloging rules is much needed, but not welcomed by all. Blogs and listservs such as *Planet Cataloging* [5] or *RDA-L* [6] within the global cataloging community are ablaze with talk on RDA and functional requirements, raising more questions and offering critical and constructive analysis (for example, see comments by the Cataloguing Committee of the Swedish Library Association Swedish Library [7]). They are also very often portals for venting frustrations brought on by an imminent change in comfortable cataloging procedures. The main questions being asked are "How do we use it?" and "How do we implement it in our library?" and "Are the vendors creating new systems that use it?" Perhaps the most challenging aspect will be learning the complexity of the FRBR entity-relationship models in which information resources are classified as Works, Expressions, Manifestations and Items (often referred to as WEMI).

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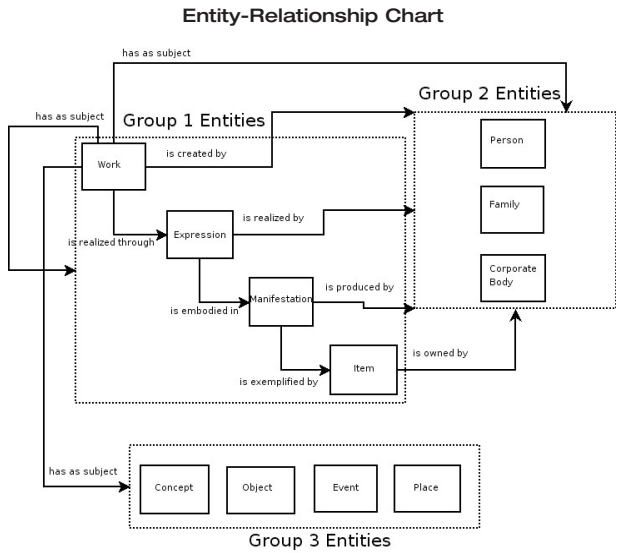
FIGURE 1. Entity-Relationship chart (from www.frbr.org/files/entity-relationships.png, at the FRBR blog at www.frbr.org/) [9]



The FRBR and FRAD conceptual models resulted from the international cataloguing community's effort to address a constantly changing information environment, the emergence of new forms of information resources and increasing density of networked information systems. In 2007 Howarth and Weihs [8] wrote

> The cataloguing community is clearly at a crossroad, navigating the transition from forty years of creating bibliographic records using the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules within a print-dominant environment to a proposed new content standard that reaches beyond the library domain to a world of digital objects and multipurpose metadata. (p. 15)

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The Joint Steering Community for the Development of RDA (JSC) has called for constituency reviews of several drafts of the new rules [1], with the intent of reviewing all submissions and incorporating comments and edits when and where possible.

AACR2 arranges chapters by the type of information resource and then by type of main or added access points (see Table 1). In AACR2's Part I, chapters 2-12 each focus on a separate format and address only the description of the resources. The code is weak on access points, even though Part II is devoted to choice and formation of personal, corporate body and title access points and discusses main and added access points (always a sore point for many catalogers, especially in the digital environment). Catalogers have to look all over Part II for access point provisions (for example, title access points are mentioned in chapter 21 only – and then just as a default provision and with little direction). Most importantly, AACR2 is not based on the idea of a *work*. Rather, it is very much based on the unit record system (that is, the *item*).

RDA puts considerably more emphasis on authority control as well as having a vastly different structure from its predecessor. As outlined in the "RDA Scope and Structure" [1] the new rules are "… divided into ten sections: sections 1-4 cover elements corresponding to the entity *attributes* defined in FRBR and FRAD; sections 5-10 cover elements corresponding to the *relationships* defined in FRBR and FRAD." (p. 7). Furthermore the choice of what type of record to create, once based on the format, is shifted to what "type of description" the record should represent – comprehensive, analytical or multi-level (that is, both comprehensive and analytical). In cataloging terminology an entry is "analytical" if it includes a description or analysis of the sub-parts of the resource being cataloged. In other words, with the RDA, the variety of resource formats represented in a library catalog is not in question. The question now centers more heavily on the scope of the representation. This shift in focus allows the catalog to accommodate the interpretation and/or depiction of relationships between resources more readily within a dynamic library environment. Current catalogs mostly operate on the premise that one record represents one resource. It is now possible with RDA to create records that may represent more than one

TABLE 1. RDA [1] and AACR2 [2] compared. (Left) RDA (37 chapters, 13 appendices) and (right) AACR2 (20 chapters, 5 appendices)

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION AND ACCESS (RDA)	ANGLO-AMERICAN CATALOGING RULES, 2ND ED., REV.
RECORDING ATTRIBUTES	PART I. DESCRIPTION
Introduction	Introduction
Section 1. Chapters 1-4 Recording attributes of manifestation and item	Chapter 1 General rules
Section 2. Chapters 5-7 Recording attributes of work and expression	Chapters 2-12 Special Rules
Section 3. Chapters 8-11 Recording attributes of person, family, and corporate body	Chapter 13 Analytical descriptions
Section 4. Chapters 12-16 Recording attributes of concept, object, event and place	PART II. HEADINGS, UNIFORM TITLES AND REFERENCES
RECORDING RELATIONSHIPS	Chapter 20 Introduction
Section 5. Chapter 17 Recording primary relationships between work, expression, manifestation, and item	Chapter 21 Choice of access points [main and added]
Section 6. Chapters 18-22 Recording relationships to persons, families, and corporate bodies	Chapter 22 Headings for persons
Section 7. Chapter 23 Recording relationships to concepts, objects, events, and places associated with a work	Chapter 23 Geographic names
Section 8. Chapters 24-28 Recording relationships between works, expressions manifestations, and items	Chapter 24 Headings for corporate bodies
Section 9. Chapters 29-32 Recording relationships between persons, families, and corporate bodies	Chapter 25 Uniform Titles
Section 10. Chapters 33-37 Recording relationships between concepts, objects, events, and places	Chapter 26 Reference
Appendices A-M Glossary	Appendices A-E Index

resource, should the cataloger choose to do so, or to group and display single-item records in order to show more clearly how they are related.

However, as Oliver points out [10]:

> RDA is a content standard, not a display standard and not a metadata schema. RDA is a set of guidelines that indicates how to describe a resource, focusing on the pieces of information (or attributes) that a user is most likely to need to know. It also encourages the description of relationships between related resources and between resources and persons or bodies that contributed to creation of that resource. (p. 251)

Despite the fact that it is not an actual display standard, the possibilities of new display options in catalog systems is intriguing.

New Research Potentials

The prospect of the re-learning of library cataloging by seasoned catalogers and the re-engineering of bibliographic control systems is daunting, but we should also consider some of the areas of potential new research that may present themselves as a result of RDA, FRBR and FRAD.

The Library of Congress (LC), the National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) are working together "to make a joint decision on whether or not to implement RDA, based on the results of a test of both RDA and the web product. The goal of the test is to assure the operational, technical and economic feasibility of RDA" [11]. These tests should generate a considerable amount of data for analysis and study. At the very least, the testing may simply reveal that the rules don't work and thus show us how *not* to develop cataloging guidelines, which is always a valuable lesson.

Here are some other areas, in no particular order, that hold possibilities. Where possible, corresponding research already in progress is noted:

- FRBR's four users tasks (find, identify, select, obtain). Are they successful? How are they supported in the library catalog? MARC content designation utilization (MCDU) project has investigated MARC support of these tasks [12].
- RDA implementation issues, feasibility studies, training issues, usability studies involving catalogers, reference librarians and the end-user as they work on creating and using RDA-based records, across all types of libraries. See programs given by the RDA Implementation Task Force (ALA) at 2008 and 2009 annual and mid-winter meetings or the National Library of Australia [13] on issues of implementation.
- Redesign of library systems in order to take advantage of the entity relationship modeling. See VTLS [14] and LC [15] for examples of FRBR display software.
- More in-depth studies of bibliographic relationships, bibliographic families and how these relationships impact user searching and bibliographic control or if they are successfully represented using RDA and similar questions.
- Entity-relationship models and visualizing new cataloging workflows; how the ER model of work, expression, manifestation, item (WEMI) is used to portray relationships between resources, its impact resource discovery, user satisfaction and other factors. See the cataloging scenarios at the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative website [16].
- Impact on encoding standards such as MARC and Dublin Core [17], [12]
- Historical studies of cataloging rules, changes in these rules and AACR1, AACR2 implementations (for example Knowlton's recent article in *Library Resources & Technical Service* on criticism of cataloging code reform 1957-66 [18]).
- Diffusion of RDA within the cataloging community, rate of adoption and understanding by libraries and catalogers
- Re-conceptualization of bibliographic control: This will perhaps be the most impacted area of LIS. See recent reports such as *On the Record* by the Working Group for the Future of Bibliographic Control at the Library of Congress [19], as well as the public testimonies submitted to the group by members of the cataloging community. Recommendations from the report – the guiding principles, Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, in particular, should be considered.
- Re-defining the library catalog – what are the boundaries of the catalog, objectives of the catalog. These issues are worthy of a serious

dissertation or two. (For example, see the *RDA-L* listserv [6] thread "libraries, society and RDA" from Nov 2008.)

- Addition of non-traditional data to bibliographic records such as citation data, reviews and tag clouds
- Studies such as Shoichi Taniguchi's work on orientedness in cataloging rules, recording the history of changes in data values, design of cataloging rules and similar topics ([20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25])
- Interoperability between library systems, copy cataloging, outsourcing of records as impacted by choice of type of description (comprehensive, analytical or multilevel)
- Bibliographic control education in LIS programs – new curriculum, standards, textbooks, manuals and other teaching materials, especially the problem of when, and if, to stop teaching AACR2 and when to start teaching RDA. ■

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