

## Who Rules the Rules?

"Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?" wondered Henry Higgins, implying that a lack of widely and consistently followed rules of usage created linguistic backwardness and anarchy. Higgins' question might be rephrased today as: "When will the code teach its founders how to catalog?"

The Library of Congress has historically fitted catalog codes to its own practices rather than following them slavishly. The best example is the lamentable policy of superimposition: continued use of preestablished forms of names that are not in compliance with the *Paris Principles* or *AACRI*. This was a cause of widespread confusion and complaint and the practice was eventually discontinued . . . well, sort of discontinued. The various interpretations of *AACRI*, the inclusion of new rules, and pressure for further modifications eventually led to the drafting of *AACR2*, a code that was supposed to end variance and controversial practices.

One might assume that including LC as a principal author of the new text and an LC official as one of the editors might result in a code that it could actually follow. Judging by the spate of exceptions and interpretations made so far (more than 300), this has not been the case. In the place of superimposition, we have new impositions known as "compatible headings." They may not be readily ascertained according to the rules, but have been granted a sort of bibliographic squatter's rights.

Although it would be simpler for catalogers to follow the rules consistently, they must instead check several *Cataloging Service Bulletins* and *Name Authorities* to see whether LC has determined that a given personal, corporate, or serial name is already "compatible" with *AACR2*. This can result in cataloging delays, higher processing costs, and inconsistent entries. *AACR2* and uncertainties regarding its application by LC have been widely credited with lower cataloging productivity.

This is not to imply that LC is behaving in a strictly arbitrary or capricious manner vis-à-vis the code. They can be seen as caught on the horns of a trilemma, with vast internal needs and increasing external demands competing for a shrinking budget. President Reagan may have whispered sweet nothings during National Library Week, but during budget hearings it became clear that libraries are not as "truly needy" as impoverished generals and interior decorators.

Decisions to depart from *AACR2* have been based primarily on cost factors. The decision by the RTSD Catalog Code Revision Committee and the Joint Steering Committee not to consider cost and implementation factors has led both to widespread opposition to the code resulting in a one-year delay in implementation, and to the modifications that LC has made and is making. Some variations such as using "Dept." for "Depart-

ment" and "House" for "House of Representatives" make fiscal and common sense. Many other LC changes are simply bibliographic nit-picking, minor irritants to catalogers who must flip back and forth between the text of AACR2 and half a dozen *Bulletins* to settle a minor point of description. Why didn't LC representatives attempt to say, "Wait a minute—we just can't do that now," while the code was being considered rather than after it was published? Anyway, considering that LC was starting up a whole new catalog and closing the old one, one wonders why rules not to be applied retrospectively had to be tinkered with to such an extent.

Major questions still to be resolved include not only the compatible-name quandary, but the treatment of serials, microform reproductions, establishment of corporate names and determination of when works "emanate from" corporate bodies, and the romanization of Slavic names.

The decision to use title entry for serials and monographic series even in the case of generic titles has been controversial. There are, of course, exceptions to the rules, and there will be differences in how uncertain catalogers construct complex entries with parenthetical modifiers. Unfortunately, rules establishing entries for serials have sometimes been muddled rather than clarified in the *Bulletin*. Consider the example in the Winter 1981 issue wherein the bulletin of the Engineering Station of West Virginia University is entered under "Bulletin," while the same publication for the entire university is entered under "West Virginia University Bulletin." Also, consider the complex cross-reference structure required to direct users between the two files, both of which may well be split again, historically, between author/title and title main entry. This is a special problem in the case of large monographic series generated by corporate bodies.

The LC position on microform reproductions of previously published works is clearer, but is still a point of controversy. They have decided to provide the imprint and collation (er, make that "Publication, distribution, etc., area" and "Physical description area") of the original work, with a description of the microform in a note. In other words, they're sticking to AACR1. The RTSD CCS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access is currently trying to resolve this conflict, one in which many research libraries have sided with LC. This body is also trying to unravel the mystique of "corporate emanation" introduced in AACR2.

Another sore point has been the LC decision to follow an alternative rule, which prefers commonly known forms of romanized names over those established via systematic romanization. That LC is correctly following the spirit of the general principle for personal names is little comfort to research libraries with large Slavic collections.

How are other libraries responding to the murky form of AACR2? Some are closing old card catalogs and continuing them with COM or temporary card supplements. Some of these are establishing cross-reference links between variant forms of names between catalogs, while others are not.

Some are keeping their catalogs open and shifting files, while others are splitting files. Some are shifting some files and splitting others. AACR2 was intended to provide headings that could be easily ascertained by the user. Ironically, the temporary result is scrambled catalogs: access systems involving multiple lookups and built-in confusion. Until most bibliographic records are in machine-readable form under reliable authority control this will continue to be the case. Authority control, it would seem, has long been an idea whose time has come but whose application is yet to be realized.

The cooperative efforts of the Library of Congress and the major bibliographic utilities to establish reliable automated authority control will do much to ameliorate the problems presented by AACR2. It would also be helpful if LC, perhaps with the financial assistance of other libraries, networks, and foundations, would publish what might be called AACR2½—not a new edition of the code but one accurately reflecting actual LC practice. Finally, future code makers would be wise to consider cost and other implementation factors in their deliberations. Professor Higgins, ever the optimist, would rather sing “Wouldn’t it be lovely” than hear another verse of “I did it my way.”

JAMES R. DWYER

#### EDITOR'S NOTES

##### *Title Change*

It often seems that the only things that change their names as often as library publications are standards organizations. Not to be left out, *JOLA* will be called *Information Technology and Libraries* beginning with Volume 1, Number 1, the March 1982 issue. This name was approved by the LITA Board in San Francisco this June as more accurately reflecting the true scope of the journal.

##### *New Section*

With this issue, we are initiating a new section: “Reports and Working Papers.” This is intended to help disseminate documents of particular interest to the *JOLA* readership. We solicit suggestions of documents, often developed as working papers for a specific purpose or group but of interest and value to our readership. In general, documents in this section are neither refereed nor edited.

##### *Mitch*

I take great personal pleasure in publishing Mike Malinconico’s speech upon presenting the 1981 LITA Award to Mitch Freedman.

##### *Readers’ Comments*

We do continue to solicit suggestions about the journal but receive few. Is anybody reading it? If you have any thoughts about what we should or shouldn’t do, we would welcome your sharing them.