Crystal Mills
LIS 9200: Prof. Grant Campbell
March 24th, 2010

Uniform Titles

Introduction

In times of economic duress, it is not uncommon for institutions to look toward the library for expenses to reduce, and in turn, for management to conceive as expendable the functions which they understand little about. Cataloguing as performed by specialists, apart from that of cataloguing agencies producing records en masse, is commonly perceived as an arcane and esoteric practice of marginal or indiscernible value to patrons. However, many librarians argue persuasively that the catalogue is central to the profession, and maintaining a high degree of depth and accuracy in record surrogates is crucial to discovery within the library. In the scenario presented, the director of an academic research library has reduced the cataloguing staff by two persons and requested that, in order to not delay the processing of new materials, the policy of adding uniform titles for translated or collected works be abolished. The cataloguing staff have reacted passionately, and are concerned for the integrity of the catalogue; however, the workload from the eliminated two positions must be redistributed in some fashion. This essay will examine the practice and value of uniform titles in the context of a catalogue intended for scrupulous research, the advantages and obstacles to uniform titles, and the managerial options that might be employed in response to this situation.

Uniform Titles in AACR2

The introduction of the chapter on uniform titles in AACR2 makes clear that the instructions are optional, to be applied "according to the policy of the cataloguing agency", which may vary between circumstances "from one catalogue to another" as well as "within one catalogue" (25.1A). Weihs and Howarth (2008) note that "this optionality has resulted in uneven application across different types and sizes of libraries, and varying formats within collections" (p. 367), though the permission of such flexibility allows the catalogue to be tailored to meet user needs. Uniform titles are typically considered or implemented in cases where the work is commonly known by a variant title, where variations in the title proper for different editions would result in the works not collocating together, where different works bear the same title proper, where the work is a translation, and where it is desirable that anthologies of works of single authorship be collocated together.

For example, the title page of a translated work often bears the title proper in a language not primary to all users, in which the original title is more commonly known, as in the French translation of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Le Seigneur des anneaux*. Without the inclusion of the title in the original language, users would be expected to either produce the French title in order to locate the French text, or reach the record through some indirect path, such as by the author heading link. Alternately, the reverse may be true,

where a scholar seeks a work translated to English, but employs the original title, such as the Italian *Il formaggio e i vermi.* The addition of the language of the work held simplifies identification. Further, libraries may acquire dozens of anthologies of any particular author, not simply to collect their body of work, but for interest in the text itself and its meaning historically as represented by editor, translator, date, publisher, etc. The collective title of such compilations is often unmemorable, e.g. *The poetry and prose of Percy Shelley*, but by adding the uniform title [Works] for the complete works, [Selections] for three or more works in various forms, or a uniform title for selections of a particular form, e.g. [Plays. Selections], in addition to the date of publication, users can browse a chronological list of collected or selected works by a person. These rules are particularly important in some contexts, such as in libraries with extensive music or religious holdings, where the item may not bear a distinctive title, or is commonly known by an alternate or truncated title: "In many libraries (including Juilliard) the uniform titles are also used as the spine title on the item itself. Thus the 'Archduke Trio' can be found in collections of Beethoven's *Trios, piano, strings*, as well as in individual editions with the uniform title *Trios, piano, strings, op. 97, Bb major*" (Gottlieb, 1994, p. 50).

Authority Control

An important aspect of the uniform title is the locally maintained authority file. In all cases, the greatest determinant of uniform title policy is the degree to which the catalogue is used by patrons as a research tool in itself; however, the value of uniform headings or controlled vocabulary for naming and subjects is seldom debated (Weihs & Howarth, 2008, p. 368). Here, we understand and accept the principle of authority control in order to act as a primary key for differentiating identical personal and corporate names, and to create consistency in use of subject headings. Uniform titles offer the same benefits through linkages in the catalogue when titles are created consistently. An attractive alternative to the uniform title is the variant title, placed in the MARC 246 field and typically used for parallel titles, portions of the title proper, and titles found in the document outside the primary source of information. The 246 field can be used "on the fly" without validation from an authority record, which significantly reduces the time required for the cataloguer to add the access point, but heightens the risk of multiple cataloguers entering variations of the same title for different editions or translations of a work. If an added title is desired to link records, and not only as an access point to a single record, the cataloguer would have to consult 246 fields for previous editions, which may be no less lengthy a task.

The functionality of the authority catalogue in the ILS is often burdensome, and requires cataloguers to not only acquire authorized forms of names, subjects and titles from an outside source such as Library of Congress or Amicus, but also to maintain full authority records with cross-references in a separate module or task window. Validating fields with a corresponding entry in the authority file is often finicky because of the precision required in spelling, spacing, diacritical marks, and subfields; however, standard practice fosters linkages not only within the local catalogue, but also in the "current shared cataloguing environment" (Weihs & Howarth, 2008, p. 368) as a whole, which is steadily trending toward increased collaboration: "The more we move beyond our local catalogs, and bibliographic practices to shared—even global—online catalogs,

databases, and digital repositories, the greater the need for rethinking consistency of application as well as structure" (Weihs & Howarth, 2008, p. 380).

Perception of Uniform Titles

With the impending release of RDA and new interest in information seeking behaviours, study of the benefit to users brought by uniform titles would be relevant and practical for libraries looking to relieve pressure on cataloguing departments: "One respondent suggested that the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR (JSC) should conduct an investigation of what uniform titles are used for and whether they do fulfill the aims of collocation" (p. 368). An article from Hider and Tan (2008) compiles results of surveys on OPAC use by patrons, and their ranking of the importance of various fields in identification and selection on a six-point Likert-scale. Unfortunately, only one questionnaire, administered at the State Library of Victoria (SLV), included uniform titles as a distinct category. Respondents at this library ranked uniform titles among the least useful elements, with 44 and 30% assessing uniform titles as "not at all useful/don't know what it means" for identification and selection, respectively, second only to ISBN/ISSN in *uselessness* (Hider & Tan, 2008, p. 356-357). SLV is described as a public library that is largely closed access, and thus may not have a user population informed about the function of uniform titles, or in need of specific editions, translations, etc. as demonstrated by the low ranking of ISBN.

While it cannot be proposed that a library undertake protracted or expensive research into the effectiveness of uniform titles during a time of cutbacks, if detailed statistics are available on catalogue usage, it would be helpful to examine them. To catalogue with long-term goals in mind requires weighing principles in development, such as those formulated by the IFLA Meetings of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code (2008) and draft versions of RDA (2007). Weihs and Howarth (2008) note the "disappearance of the terminology, 'uniform title,' from the lexicon" (p. 375) from both documents. While RDA and IME ICC largely preserve the opinion that titles as added access points can perform the functions as described by AACR2, and that the commonly used title in the original language of publication should be included in the record, "the abandonment of 'uniform title' as a particular kind of access point is doubly unfortunate, since the simple 'title' causes ambiguity" (Weihs & Howarth, 2008, p. 376). It may be the case that support for the uniform title as a unique entity is faltering, and either researchers should be taught to employ them effectively, or they should be abandoned for simpler practices such as variant title added entries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In any workplace, it is often challenging to look at entrenched practices and standards objectively to assess their relative benefit to clients or users. The knowledge that a task performed meticulously in the past, such as maintaining authorized uniform titles, has limited value when compared to other concerns, such as minimizing the backlog of new books to be processed, may hurt and anger employees, and moreso after the attrition of related job positions. Realistically, after the elimination of two cataloguing

positions (a high number even for a large academic library), all options should be assessed by the head of the department. Could records be purchased in bulk and edited to reduce cataloguing time per item? Could any librarian positions be reclassified to allow a library technician to perform the same tasks at a lower wage (or similarly, a technician position replaced by student workers)? Is there any specialized cataloguing performed that could be placed on-hold, such as original cataloguing of theses, sheet music, microfiche etc.? Are there other practices that could also be re-examined, such as the addition of lengthy note fields, unused leader fields, original subject heading creation, etc.? It is difficult to decide conclusively on the issue of uniform titles without weighing all options.

If in fact, the task of cataloguing with the inclusion of uniform titles was consuming the majority of time of two staff members, such that the reallocation of workload would be sustainable by remaining cataloguers with the policy concerning uniform titles eliminated, then the practice was altogether too expensive. While uniform titles do have a role within the library, and assist in identification and collocation "consistent with Charles Cutter's advocacy for 'the convenience of the user'" (Weihs & Howarth, 2008, p. 379), in a situation where sacrifices must be made, replacing uniform titles with policy on 246 variant title creation would be a viable alternative.

References

Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd ed., 2005 rev.

Gottlieb, J. (1994). Reference service for performing musicians: understanding and meeting their needs. In J. Reynolds, ed., *Reference services in the humanities* (47-59). New York: Haworth Press.

Hider, P. and Tan, K.-C.(2008). Constructing record quality measures based on catalog use. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 46(4), 338-361.

Weihs, J. and Howarth, L.C. (2008). Uniform titles from AACR to RDA. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 46(4), 362-384.