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International Dateline -- Which is Right? Florence or Firenze? -- Issues In International Authority Control

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International Dateline — Which is Right? Florence or Firenze?

Issues In International Authority Control

by Claire-Lise Bénéaud and Sever Bordeianu (University of New Mexico)

Introduction

How to name people, places, organizations, and concepts when dealing with multiple languages, cultures, and scripts is no small feat. Through authority control, catalogers have tackled this issue locally forever but have seldom been able to transcend national boundaries. Authority control sets up the correct form of a name and provides the cross-reference structure that gives validity and useability to library catalogs. In the US, under the leadership of the **Library of Congress**, authority control has been an integral part of cataloging. American librarians have created rich and complex authority files that are shared nationally. But, with all its complexity, applying authority control in the US is relatively simple compared to the problems encountered in other countries. Countries outside of North America have longer publishing histories and have applied authority control in various ways over the centuries. East Asian countries have additional layers of complexity imposed by their intricate scripts.

Diversity in Europe and Asia is multifaceted. Languages, scripts, formats, library organizational structures, political systems, geography, resources, and cultural sensitivities all play a role in how authority control is viewed, developed, and implemented. And yet, as technology is making records available world-wide, and libraries are increasingly making efforts to share their collections, the need for authority control is more acute than ever.

For this purpose, the **University of Florence** organized the "International Conference on

Authority Control: Definition and International Experiences." The conference was held in the fourteenth century Convitto della Calza, about a fifteen minute walk from downtown Florence, from February 10th to 12th, 2003. Some 500 librarians attended. The majority were Italian — looking very stylish as a group — and the rest came from Western Europe (Holland, Sweden, France, England, Germany, and Switzerland) with some Americans, Canadians, and a few participants from East Asia. Most of the presentations revolved around the idea of going from local authority control (and by local, sometimes it meant national, and sometimes it meant regional) to global authority control. The aim of the conference was to offer an occasion for rethinking, comparing, and reporting on ongoing projects. It focused on how to name individuals and families. Naming corporations, events, and topics is more complicated and was scarcely addressed. The lack of international cataloging rules, the different authority control models used throughout the world, linguistic, cultural and political considerations all have an impact on the development of a world-wide structure.

Why Authority Control Matters

There was little disagreement among the participants that authority control is essential. **Mauro Guerrini**, the conference organizer, and **Michael Gorman**, the keynote speaker presented the arguments for the continuous need for authority control. Effective cataloging requires consistency of the form of access in order to identify, select, and obtain the correct in-

formation. Access points need to be standardized. Without a standard form of a name, catalogers reach different conclusions even when presented with the same evidence. An authoritative name is the most common form of a name within a cultural setting. **Guerrini** set the tone of the conference by stating that plurality is not only linguistic but cultural. Authority control should respect this plurality and therefore, a worldwide adoption of the same form of a heading by all is not tenable. The issue is how to share authority records in different languages and scripts rather than establish universal headings.

Coupled with a lack of universal availability of headings is an even more worrisome trend, that is, not applying any kind of authority control. **Gorman** mentioned the **Dublin Core** and the Web as examples of either minimum or non-existent authority control. Web searches are ineffective and retrieve very large volumes of information with many aberrant results. As a test, **Gorman** did a search on his own name in **Google** and retrieved over 7,700 entries, most having nothing to do with him or his works. He characterized the Dublin Core as naïve, simplistic, and unsuited for reflecting the complexity of what needs to be cataloged. With his trademark wit, he concluded that a complicated world needs complicated rules.

Challenges

Lack of International Cataloging Rules

The world has no global cataloging rules, no global classification system, and no global

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subject thesaurus. Outside the Anglo-American world, AACR2 is considered a foreign standard. World-wide, librarians would rather use international standards. Gorman proposes the creation of a universal cataloging code based on broad rules that would be supplemented with national rules. Such a code would need a mechanism to take into account authority records reflecting linguistic and cultural differences.

Multiple Models

Barbara Tillet of the Library of Congress, a leading authority on the subject, described how to share authority files among different library communities and how to link national authority files. Several models could be used: one authority record for one entity; several authority records for the same entity that are linked; one centralized agency for the world; or, one centralized server for all authority files, a kind of a virtual union list of authority files. None of these models has been tried so far. It is expected that an authority file should display the language and the script used by the library patron. Initially, IFLA considered the use of a single authority record for a name and local computers set up to display specific linguistic preferences. The current thinking is to give each entity a unique and persistent number (because numbers have no linguistic or cultural identities) and to attach this number to names in national authority files. One authority record or linked authority records could have several displays in various languages, scripts, and reflect spelling preferences (including different transliteration schemes). Tillet enumerated the host of challenges the world bibliographic community is facing: 1) different cataloging rules (for example, AACR2 states that ships, events, and meetings of corporate bodies need to have authority records; German cataloging rules do not); some cataloging codes use undifferentiated forms of names, others that do not; 2) different languages and different scripts; 3) different formats such as MARC, MARC21, UNIMARC, XML; and 4) catalogs with no rules whatsoever.

The IFLA Functional Requirements for Bib Records (FRBR) which consist in finding, identifying, selecting, and obtaining bibliographic records, is a model which could also be used for authority records. Marie-France Plassard, reporting on IFLA's "Working Group on Minimal Level Authority Records," stated that a minimal authority record should include the character set, the script of cataloging, and the description of the rules used to establish the heading. The group would like all national authority files to be available on the Web to promote the exchange of authority data.

FRANAR (Functional Requirements And Numbering of Authority Records), another IFLA project is studying the feasibility of an authority record number called the "International Standard Authority Data Number" or ISADN, similar to an ISSN. The ISADN could be assigned to an entity, a heading, or a record. Glenn Patton of OCLC, defined an entity as a person, a family, a corporate body, a work, an expression, a manifestation, an item, a concept,

an object, an event or a place. All these entities may be known by a name and the record will include the authorized form of the name as well as its variants. The authority record should also include relationships: an earlier or later name, a real name or a pseudonym, a part versus a whole, a person versus a group, parallel languages, and different scripts.

Cultural Considerations

By far the most unexpected aspect of authority control to American librarians were the political considerations extant in Asian countries. Eisuke Naito from Toyo University in Japan, discussed Asian names written in Chinese, Japanese and Korean (CJK). Issues dealing with scripts make CJK authority headings very complex. While Japan, China, and Korea have different languages, they all use the Chinese character set, but the script conventions used by each country have evolved differently. The Chinese script which contains 100,000 characters was simplified in 1956. As a result, there are tremendous variations among names, which creates great difficulty in retrieval. The foreign translation of names is a common practice and adds to problems created by transliteration. Even fact finding, normally a relatively simple endeavor, is cumbersome because it is not possible to get a complete set of Chinese characters in these three languages. Just as in the West, database creation is growing rapidly in the Far East and time is running out for standardizing names.

Naito was the only speaker who noted that choosing the form of a name has significant political and cultural ramifications and that historical memories between Japan, China, and Korea are a deterrent to the harmonization of names. He mentioned three issues that are rarely discussed in the US: "fear of creating organizational derangement," "historical memories of the 19th and 20th centuries," and "anxiety of political danger in core elements of cultural and political significance." While in the American library community, change is part of the work culture, it is embraced with more caution in the Far East. In the US, such issues are normally reserved for subject headings, particularly for the names of ethnic groups.

More than any other issues discussed, this topic highlighted the powerful yet subtle role that authority control has not only on bibliographic matters, but how the power of words, languages, and choices of expression impact not only communication, but other aspects of life. And in a not so subtle way, it brings to the forefront the real meaning of the expression, "what's in a name."

Teaching of Authority Control

Authority control receives little attention in our educational systems. Arlene Taylor from the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a study that looked at the emphasis given to authority control in library schools and found that IT and not traditional competencies like authority work are taught. The danger may be a new crop of librarians who believe that keyword searching of full text databases is satisfactory in large databases, which of course, contradicts all the arguments in favor of controlled vocabularies expounded by Gorman, Guerrini, and others.

The word "authority" has a negative connotation in the US and it may be more accepted if "access control" was used instead.

Archives

European libraries are rich in archival collections, and authority control for archives, which present a different set of problems, received a lot of attention. Stefano Vitali, from the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, discussed Archival Descriptive Standards and authority work for persons, families, and corporate bodies. Describing archives means providing information about their creators and the historical context of their creation. In archives, the name of the creator is the most important access point. Archival records are more complete than library authority records because they must include the context (i.e., the relation between creator and other corporate bodies, persons, and families). The stress is on the real entity rather than the name of the heading. Traditionally, the relationship between an archive and its creator was one-to-one, linear, and static. In more recent archival thought — because many archives are divided, scattered, or merged over time — one creator may correspond to many archival collections. The relationships are complex and multi-dimensional. IFLA suggested a model (ISAAR, International Standard Archival Authority Record) for separate and linked descriptions of creators. The archives themselves may be housed in different libraries and museums but share the same creator. In order to link this contextual information, the creator needs to be recorded in a standardized manner.

The international community has developed EAD (Encoded Archival Description) to address archival description. Daniel Pitti, from the University of Virginia stressed that archival records should reflect individuals and families and how they lived their lives and how they conducted business. The records need an historical context in order to be understood. The authority records should include evidence of people acting in particular places and time. As far as international cooperation, he noted that we should agree as much as we can and leave room for differences.

The German LEAF (Linking and Exploring Authority Files) project, coordinated by the University of Berlin and funded by the European Commission, is creating and exploring the use of authority files in archival databases. LEAF, described by Jutta Weber, is a consortium that includes institutions from all over Europe. The goal of LEAF is to provide a tool to collect, harvest, and link person information. It consists of a search engine that can search various local authority files in different formats at various institutions without the loss of information. The links are simple and include the family name and the year of birth and death. Once LEAF has brought together the authority records from various institutions, it creates a Central Name Authority File. Institutions that have additional information about a person can update this database as needed. However, LEAF has not solved the problem of how to update records when institutions revise their own local authority records or when they add new names to their local databases.

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Projects

US Projects

The premier international cooperative authority project is **NACO**, under the umbrella of the **Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC)**. It began in 1976 under the leadership of the **Library of Congress** and currently has 395 contributing partners. **John Byrum of LC**, stressed that sharing the work has many advantages, ranging from cost effectiveness, to developing common standards, to creating a very large file, and gives participants a sense of ownership. 220,000 new records are added to the **NACO** file every year, including records created in sixteen foreign countries. **NACO** libraries have contributed 64% of the names and 73% of the series in the **Name Authority File**.

Ana Cristan also from **LC**, described **SACO**, the **Subject Authority Component** of the **Program for Cooperative Cataloging**. The American library community views authority control differently than its European counterparts. Many US as well as foreign libraries are invited to submit new subject headings to the **Library of Congress** subject file. This very democratic model has its shortcomings, language of cataloging being the primary problem. As the **Library of Congress** reaches out to the international community, non-English speaking countries still need to use the English form of a subject. The vernacular form of subjects are only accepted if no English form exists. In the long run, this problem of non-English subject headings will need to be solved.

Going counter to creating a single international database, **OCLC's FAST** project (**Faceted Application of Subject Terminology**), presented by **Rebecca Dean**, is developing an authority file of subject headings for metadata. There were 7.4 million Websites in 2002 (or 83 trillion pages) where metadata could be applied. **FAST** headings are a simplified version of the **Library of Congress Subject Headings**. Using the **Dublin Core**, a cataloger should be able to use these simple, easy, and intuitive subject headings. **FAST's** objective is to facilitate precision and recall of Web pages when doing a subject search. However, it seems counterproductive for catalogers to use yet another thesaurus, albeit a simpler one.

European Projects

The **MACS** project (**Multiple Access to Subject**) is a virtual multi-lingual authority file. This prototype, presented by **Genevieve Clavel Merrin**, began in 1997. It lists subject headings in German, English, and French, side-by-side. The database so far includes a limited subset of subjects (sports and theater). Subjects in each language are mapped to correspond to each other, so that when a user does a search in his or her native language, using **Z39.50** and link management software, they can retrieve documents in another

language. She discussed how to cross-search various authority files and focused on the structure of headings. The US structure consists of a main heading followed by subheadings or free-floating subdivisions. In Germany subheadings are not used, but instead, multiple headings are used. This project may prove useful for a few languages, but could become unwieldy if expanded to include more languages.

Andrew MacEwan, from the British Library, reported on "Project Interparty," and discussed the relationship between library authority files and e-commerce. This project, which is not yet operational, was initiated by people working in the trade sector. It is funded by the **European Community** and also has US partners such as the **Library of Congress** and **OCLC**. The aim of this project is for the business sector to identify the correct names of authors, performers, producers, and publishers, in order to negotiate agreements, pay royalties, and manage copyright (e.g., it is not uncommon for copyright checks to be sent to the wrong person). Retailers could also have access to this database to better serve their clients. Currently, there are many databases that contain "party metadata" and that have different structures and use different approaches. The **Interparty** membership will include parties who see a business benefit in identifying people. Libraries and retailers share the same goal, i.e., identify persons correctly. As in libraries, **Interparty** needs sufficient metadata to allow "disambiguation." Authority records need to be unique to be valuable. Complex relationships such as two authors writing under a single name, members of

a band, or the use of pseudonyms have to be indicated. Unlike libraries, the business sector is interested in the public identity of authors and performers rather than the "real" person. However, in many instances, records for public identities look like records for real people (i.e., date of birth).

Conclusion

The choice of language which the presenters used was in itself a reminder of the difficulty in creating standardized all-purpose records. Except for the Italians, who presented in Italian, the other presenters used English, regardless of country of origin. In most cases, **PowerPoint** presentations in English accompanied the Italian speeches. The papers were also available on the Web, at www.unifi.it/biblioteche/ac/ in both Italian and English. Language, even with the help of the sophisticated technology available to presenters, made it sometimes difficult for speakers of one language to understand the presentations given in the other language. Several issues became obvious from this conference. While authority control is essential, it is time-consuming and complicated. Two leitmotifs permeated the conference: infrastructure and cost. Technology per se was not identified as a barrier. Most current international projects are prototypes and are far from being operational. Naming is so deeply rooted in language and culture that even within the same country disagreements exist. Achieving international authority control is a lofty goal, and we have a long way to go. 🌱

CHAOS — Standards Column

Revision of the ISSN Standard: The Challenge of Change

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Column Editor's Note: One of the most enduring (and bogus) arguments against the adoption of standards is that they are difficult to change and lock us in. Not so! Standards do change (sometimes on a continual basis) as implementers re-tool them to keep them responsive to new technologies or new ways of doing things. One of our community's most stable and widely used standards, the **ISSN**, is now entering a revision cycle. The US is a key participant in the international deliberations just begun under the auspices of the **ISO**; the delegation of experts appointed by **NISO** includes **Yvette Diven**, **Ed Pentz**, and **Regina Reynolds**. In this first report **Regina Reynolds** reports on the initial meeting of the **ISO working group** tackling the revision. **Regina Reynolds** highlights the range of discussion and specific issues that the **Working Group** will address. Look for updates in this column as the work progresses. Undoubtedly, the decisions taken (or not taken) will have the potential to shape the industry. — **PH**

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