



Changes in Cataloging Codes: Rules for Description

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IN A SIMPLER era, an "international standard" was the considered opinion of a single intellect—preferably an opinion formed in the context of wise consultation and practical experience—which was subsequently adopted and/or adapted for use by individuals, institutions, or groups far from the sphere of the originator. Is not the *Dewey Decimal Classification* (DDC) still a prime example of an international standard in bibliographic control? The most restrictive definition of "international standard" today would presumably limit the term's application to the official promulgations of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Although ISO standards may be generated originally from a single mind, the burden of past practice and the complex structure of interrelated activities dependent on bibliographic standards now militate so strongly against any change that the proposals of any new Solomon (a latterday Charles Ammi Cutter, perhaps?) are perforce subjected to years of bureaucratic evaluation. Considering that scarcely ten years have passed since the first significant advance in more than one-half century toward internationalizing rules for descriptive cataloging,* it may be a miracle of efficiency that the first ISO-accepted standard in the field has been established. These ten years have produced the substantial advances which are the focus of this article, but the stir of activity has thus far only muddied the waters. The calmest pools are now perhaps near the point of settling

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*Throughout this article, the terms *description* and *descriptive cataloging* are to be understood as having no reference whatever to headings or access points. They refer solely to what North American practice has called "the body of the entry," beginning with the transcription of the title, plus the collation/series data and the notes.

down, but eddies and whirlpools will continue to becloud the stormier channels for at least several years. Thus, this article presents an incomplete story.

In all the recent flurry of activity, the major issues have related to purpose and definition, and the most strongly worded arguments against any marked change have come from those with substantial investment in the past. These observations would be clichés except for the two new contexts of internationalism and "The Machine," which have significantly altered the administrative, linguistic, economic, and time environments in which issues of purpose, definition, cost, and implementation must now be resolved. One might plaintively observe that these new contexts might have been coped with one at a time, and that their coincidence has proved nearly unmanageable; but for ten years they have been inseparable in the developed countries where any changes are of prime consequence against the background of more insular and nonmechanized past practice.

J. C. M. Hanson concluded his comparison of cataloging codes with the statement:

While it is true that an eventual code intended to serve as a basis for international agreement would have to deal with all these items, it is not the purpose of the present study to undertake any detailed comparison of the kind and amount of information prescribed by the various codes as regards title, imprint, collation, etc. . . . While standard rules and uniformity of entry are desirable throughout, slight variations in title and imprint would not prove the hindrance to co-operation which might result from differences in headings.¹

Hanson, appointed chief of the Catalog Department of the Library of Congress (LC) at the beginning of that institution's bibliographic reorganization in 1897, had been responsible for the development of LC practices for thirty-seven years, and was a chief architect of the world's first international cataloging code.² He was wise enough to realize that: "Should an international code ever become a reality, many libraries would refuse to subscribe to it in its entirety. They would feel free to depart from it at times, particularly in matters that did not affect the headings."³ The point is that from the beginnings of a relatively standardized North American practice, the decisions and practices of a single major institution served for a long time as what might be called a "standard." A considerable amount of material headed "Library of Congress supplementary rule," particularly in the

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sections on description, appears in both the British and American editions of the 1908 code.

After her retirement from LC, Lucile Morsch described the development of cataloging rules there through 1949, adding some trenchant comments on time/cost-effective procedures:

Until 1930, these rules [i.e., the 1908 code] were interpreted and expanded by the Library of Congress, as its use of them required, without the participation or explicit approval of the ALA. . . . There can also be no doubt that the [subsequent] wide consideration and prolonged discussion of the rules served to improve them. In the future, however, the library profession and bibliographical world may well be required to accept the Library's decisions with respect to new and revised cataloging rules as it did from 1908 to 1930.⁴

Both national and international efforts toward a complete revision of the 1908 code began in 1930. It is significant, however, that no matter which other individuals or bodies held any deliberative or decision-making power in the formulation of subsequent American and Anglo-American codes, all efforts to date have been compiled and written under the editorship of an employee of, or of someone seconded by, LC.⁵ It was only in 1949 that a formal arrangement bound LC to accept another body's veto power: "As a consequence, neither [ALA] nor the Library was thereafter free to expand or modify any detail of its cataloging rules without the specific approval of the other."⁶

Much of the foregoing discussion is equally relevant to rules for entry as to rules for description. To distinguish between them in their development prior to 1941 is almost impossible from published sources, and even the more recent literature is as scanty on matters of description as it is plentiful on matters of heading: "Descriptive cataloging is thought by many to be a rather disagreeable and tedious necessity, even by those who think it is a necessity at all, and this no doubt accounts for the comparative lack of theoretical (or, indeed, practical) writings on the subject."⁷

The 1941 preliminary American second edition of the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*,⁸ however, focused attention on description. This code marked both a high point and a low point in the philosophy and practice of description. It came closer than any other set of rules known to this writer to specifying a standardized practice in sufficient

detail to ensure standardized application and hence a uniform product. Lucile Morsch wrote that the work leading to this code "was clearly intended to provide rules that would be applied by the national library and by all other libraries in their preparation of copy for printing in the cooperative cataloging program."⁹ The 1941 code was, however, also the most immediately and widely rejected of cataloging codes, largely because of the sections on description, and perhaps because of the exigencies of that period. The detailed standard prescribed would probably have been ideal in the Victorian period, and in fact it faithfully reflected the practice which had developed in the LC house rules since 1908. Nevertheless, it was not a code to be fixed in print and, for the first time, subjected to critical review, in a year when the United States was involved in a costly world war.

In the aftermath of devastating criticism by Andrew Osborn¹⁰ and others: "attention was primarily focused on the excessively detailed rules for description. It was easier to see how these might be reduced to a greater simplicity. Exactly how rules for entry and heading could be safely cut back was not so immediately obvious but the need to 'do something' was strongly felt."¹¹ In the historical context sketched above, it is not surprising that LC acted on its own initiative, but this time it consulted the library community of North America widely through questionnaires and conferences in the course of a radical review of description. The resultant *Studies of Descriptive Cataloging*¹² embodied as complete a change of philosophy as possible from the acceptance of the title page as the basis of description. Instead of transcribing the title page, the *Studies* advocated selecting and arranging required elements. This seminal concept was embodied both in the subsequent *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress*¹³ (RDC) published in 1949 and in its successors, and is now considered a major element in the structure of a developing international standard. Older cataloging practices may have occasionally led to a similar result, but in no previous case was it a conscious philosophy:

The chief differences between the new and the previous *Rules* are that the earlier ones required a closely literal transcription of the organization and detail of the title-page of the publication being cataloged. . . . The new *Rules* emphasize the selection of data essential to the description, and the presentation of these data in more or less prescribed order. . . . The result of the change is a

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brief entry, which is believed to be simpler, yet more rather than less useful.¹⁴

The new philosophy was not noticed, or perhaps valued, as much as the resultant simplification. Even in the final months of the six years between the beginning of LC's internal review (in late 1942) and the official adoption of RDC by the American Library Association (ALA) as its standard (in 1949), ALA was successfully advocating a long list of simplifications and changes.¹⁵ To relieve the practice of description of all unnecessary detail was the obvious goal. But what is unnecessary? Is "Shakespeare. Folio. 1623." an inadequate description? Are the two volumes of Charlton Hinman's thorough, and purely descriptive, study of the same bibliographic item¹⁶ full of unnecessary detail? Where, between the 3 words and the 1,500 pages, lies the golden mean for general library purposes? Did RDC prescribe the right amount of detail, too little, or still too much? One attempt to define the context of such rules is found in section 11.1 of RDC itself:

Detailed descriptions of incunabula can generally be found in one or more of the following reference works. . . . Such descriptions need not be repeated on the cards if they fit the work being cataloged. Instead, reference is made to the best description found, making the catalog entry relatively brief and simple.¹⁷

There is a strong conceptual link between this practice and the aim of the program of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) now being developed by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Both presuppose a model description accepted by an agency which did not necessarily prepare it.

IFLA asks that each country accept the responsibility for making the bibliographic record of its own publications in accordance with agreed international standards. The acceptance of that record as the definitive bibliographic description of those publications is the acknowledgment of equality by the rest of the world.¹⁸

Linking devices to relate one description to another are now well established. Since 1966 a national bibliography serial number has been, when available, part of each entry prepared by LC under its "shared cataloging" program. The standard numbering systems (for example, ISBN and ISSN) now being adopted for bibliographic items are conceived by some as a means of directing the searcher from a potentially inadequate identification of the item to a unique standard

identification elsewhere—for example, the International Serials Data System (ISDS) data base in the case of the ISSN.

Present Anglo-American practice generally does not rely on the simultaneous existence of levels of description and linking mechanisms, but something analogous to this was used by LC as another means of determining whether RDC might in some cases still provide for an unnecessarily detailed level of description. This was the practice of “limited cataloging” applied to certain publications between 1951 and 1962. The practice was then discontinued because “a study of the experience of 11 years (1951-62) and of comments received from card subscribers and others led to the conclusion that a single set of cataloging rules should be in force for all publications.”¹⁹ Thirteen years of practical application of RDC had demonstrated that its provisions were generally satisfactory.

When existing rules for description were reviewed in the early 1960s for inclusion in the emerging *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR),²⁰ ALA and LC jointly revised RDC for clarity and organization, but without any intention of substantive change. The resulting chapters of AACR were written under the editorial direction of Lucile Morsch, who had shared with Seymour Lubetzky responsibility for the content of RDC. Sumner Spalding, the AACR general editor, wrote:

These rules [for description] did not involve the same kind of stem-to-stern recasting that characterizes the rules for entry and heading. That kind of fundamental overhaul took place back in the 1940s. . . . The end product is a text that has been extensively edited but is little changed in substance from the *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress*.²¹

In Britain, the work was approached quite differently:

The 1949 Library of Congress rules have never gained wide acceptance in Britain, many libraries still using the descriptive rules of the 1908 AA code. The cataloguing rules sub-committee, therefore, appointed another smaller committee to revise the North American text on descriptive cataloguing to bring it into line with the normal practice in modern British libraries.²²

When the North American text of AACR was released some months before the British committees' work had been completed, a reviewer wrote: “The section on description is to be greatly modified in the British edition. This modification will, it is hoped, be more in har-

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mony with contemporary British descriptive cataloguing needs."²³ Although the committees on both sides of the Atlantic exchanged drafts and minutes of deliberations, formal machinery never existed for reconciliation of their differing viewpoints on description, such as was employed to ensure the greatest possible uniformity of Part I of the code.²⁴

Finally, it should be acknowledged that despite the title page attribution of AACR, the Canadian Library Association took no part whatever in the development of Parts II or III. It was neither approached with any drafts of these parts, nor did it initiate any revisions as a body. In the words of the chairman of the ALA committee responsible for Part II, "Part II of the code is not an international code, though there have been some international discussions."²⁵

If the most significant advance of RDC had been the distinction between title page transcription and the presentation of selected essential elements of description, the British text of AACR took the principle of selection of data elements a step further by recognizing that in twentieth-century typographic practice, the title page is no longer the sole expected location for all the essential bibliographic data. Thus, North American practice continued until 1975 to enclose within brackets any required datum between the title and the publication date which was not transcribed from the title page; while British practice since 1967 has prescribed that edition and imprint data be transcribed without brackets, provided that they are "formally presented in the book, even if not on the title page."²⁶ Furthermore, British libraries have not had the long tradition of the use of the printed unit card acquired from an external source, which has so firmly fixed the unit card format of the catalog in North America. The British text, then, attempted "to avoid the implication that all catalogues are card catalogues, and another implicit assumption of the North American text—the assumption that all unit entries include the heading under which main entry is made."²⁷

The British text differs from the North American text in other ways more appropriate to an international standard. It provides less explicitly for the treatment of specialized circumstances, leaving more to the discretion of the individual or institution applying the rules than does the North American text. In this sense, the North American text is evidently an "in-house" manual for use at LC, combining principles and rules of description with much that would normally be considered the content of a departmental manual of routine and/or clerical

practice. This orientation explains the injunction to use a particular dictionary as a spelling authority, or as an extreme example, the specification of the length of typographic dashes required in the so-called "dash entry."²⁸

The justification for such level of specification, if not for the inclusion of type style, has been that virtually all the larger North American libraries use unaltered LC cataloging copy for the majority of their catalog entries, and want explicit guidance to help them to achieve complete conformity with LC style in entries prepared locally. Even Canadian libraries, for which stipulations such as the inclusion of a second place of publication if in the United States²⁹ are clearly irrelevant, appear quite as likely to follow the printed provision as to alter it for the Canadian situation. While acknowledging the possibility of identifying and distinguishing bibliographic items even if details of description vary slightly, one must recognize that at least within a single catalog, consistency is of utmost value in giving the user a sense of confidence. What confidence is possible when identifying the bibliographic status of the fourth edition of Pauline Johnson's *Legends of Vancouver* if in the same catalog, following the unequivocal edition statement, "4th ed.," the following seven imprint/collation combinations appear on different entries?

[Vancouver, B.C., Saturday Sunset Presses, c1911] 138 p.

[n.p., c1911] xiv, 138 p. 23½ × 13½ cm.

[n.p., c1911] 2 p. l., vii-xiv p., 1 l., 138 p.

[Vancouver, B.C., Printed by the Vancouver daily province, c1911]
xiv, 138 p. 24 cm.

Vancouver, Published for G. S. Forsyth, 1912. xiv, 138 p. 23 cm.

[n.p., 1913?, c1911] xiv, [1], 138 p. 24 cm.

n.p., n.d. xiv p. 1 l. 138 p.³⁰

It is impossible to determine quantitatively how much can safely be left to the discretion of the cataloger. The qualitative conclusions reached by the 1946 *Studies of Descriptive Cataloging* constitute a significant advance over previous quantitative standards, because for the first time, they are stated as "Principles of Descriptive Cataloging."³¹ In more or less the same words, these principles have found their way into RDC and the two texts of AACR, and in a more general way form the basis for the emerging international standard. Perhaps these principles are best stated in the British text of AACR: "The object of the description is consistently to describe each item as an item, to distinguish it from other items (especially from other items in

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the library), and to show its bibliographical relationship with other items."³² Any cataloger can use any set of cataloging rules to rationalize *post factum* the seven descriptions of the fourth edition of *Legends of Vancouver*; the challenge is to anticipate the type of difficulty presented by an item which has no clear publisher statement, especially when different catalogers are required to make independent judgments. The increasing importance of union catalogs, from one of which the example was taken, and of computerized search techniques in which the human intelligence has no opportunity for spontaneous evaluation of minor variations at the output stage, magnifies the problem considerably.

Recent rule revision efforts have tended to retreat to the position that more prescriptive rules ensure greater uniformity of product, while carefully avoiding regression to 1941 and a new excess. Although the two texts of AACR still differ in principle on the matter of how prescriptive the rules should be, a novel resolution of the difference has been accepted for the forthcoming second edition. (At the time of this writing, however, no rules have yet been drafted to test its effectiveness.) The areas of description have been divided into those in which "maximum uniformity" among different descriptions of the same item is essential for identification and retrieval, and those in which some latitude in choice of detail or form of presentation—i.e., "minimum uniformity"—is acceptable. It has been proposed that the rules governing the former should be highly prescriptive, while those governing the latter may be more generalized and discretionary.³³ It may be that this approach is less novel than it is representative of the fruition of a 35-year-old effort at LC:

An attempt has been made this year to distinguish between matters of fact and matters of form and to edit copy sent in by contributing libraries so that the entries will fit in with those produced by the Library of Congress as far as possible, but without insisting that its practices in matters of less vital detail be followed slavishly.³⁴

Such a solution could potentially resolve one of the greatest drawbacks to the universal acceptance of a single code for description. Resistance to such acceptance has not emphasized linguistic or national differences as much as differences in size or type of library. The research library (the intended audience for most modern national codes) and the small school or public library have very different needs, and the latter have not been well served by existing codes. The Library Association (LA) brought nearly to conclusion a project to

publish an abridgment of the British text of AACR, presumably one which in the sections on description would follow the advice: "modification should take the form of omitting details considered unnecessary in a given catalogue, rather than of presenting the same, or similar, information in a different fashion."³⁵ If the full code embodies the maximum/minimum uniformity principle described above, any abridgment will be formally a subset of the parent standard.³⁶ This is a concept which must be explored further in the international context, where national subsets of the international standard, with predictable variants provided for in the latter, will be necessary to cover matters where no international standard can be specific (for example, those closely linked to language).³⁷ Such considerations, clichés in many other fields, are unfortunately new in bibliographic control.

Among many administrative and budgetary considerations preceding LC's adoption in 1966 of the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (NPAC) was the technical consideration of whether to reproduce on an LC entry the unrevised description of an item taken from the national bibliography of that item's country of origin. The prospect of resulting inconsistencies must have seemed appalling to many—but not to the project's originator, John Cronin. Cronin demonstrated to apparently skeptical audiences

the *similarity* between the [descriptive] cataloguing practices of the various libraries and institutions represented. In the past, we have tended to talk about our differences and have overlooked the important fact that in almost every bibliographical description, no matter who prepares it, there are more similarities than differences. . . . Perhaps we had been wrong in assuming that only our own cataloguers were competent enough to prepare the records for *our* catalogues?³⁸

The beneficial effects of this realization undoubtedly influenced the ensuing events. Within a year of the first NPAC entries came two events which added incentive to a review of description at the international level: (1) publication of the two significantly variant texts of Part II of AACR, and (2) research resulting in the fixing of the Machine-readable Cataloging (MARC) II format with its tags to delimit each major datum of bibliographic identification. Directors and staffs of the national bibliographic agencies contributing copy to NPAC were conscious of their interaction with LC and with each other: "I believe it was Cronin's defiant challenge . . . that made us

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all think again about our attitudes to our own and others' cataloguing."³⁹

The pattern had been set by the 1961 International Conference on Cataloguing Principles (ICCP). At that conference, a number of principles were established on the basis of which detailed codes for entry and headings were subsequently written. In 1969, IFLA sponsored the International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts (IMCE) from which one resolution states:

efforts should be directed towards creating a system for the international exchange of information by which the standard bibliographical description of each publication would be established and distributed by a national agency in the country of origin of the publication. . . . The effectiveness of the system will be dependent upon the maximum standardization of the form and content of the bibliographical description.⁴⁰

This resolution has its obvious forerunner in Cronin's observations on the essential similarity of existing practices, and its obvious successor in the principle of the later program of Universal Bibliographic Control described above.⁴¹

Unlike ICCP, IMCE was not a meeting of official delegations from nations and international bodies, but a group of individuals, with the Anglo-American contingent well represented. Because the British had conducted the most recent thorough review of description, it was no surprise that Michael Gorman of the British National Bibliography was commissioned to survey existing practices of description in national bibliographies.⁴² When a working group was established immediately following the meeting to begin work on a standard bibliographic description (the word *international* was prefixed later), the task of drafting was delegated to Gorman.

Procedures for the preparation and acceptance of this work set a precedent for later IFLA activities of the same kind. First, a small working group was established; members were to consider themselves experts in their own right rather than representatives of an institution or organization. They met occasionally and evaluated revised drafts circulated by mail. These drafts were not widely circulated outside the working group. A preliminary edition was then published and various agencies put its provisions into effect, sometimes with conflicting interpretations. The working group, in consultation with an informal users' body, reviewed problems of intent, wording, and interpreta-

tion; finally, a definitive edition was published in one language, and translations prepared.⁴³ In the case of the first version of an International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), which ultimately acknowledged its limitation to monographic publications and became the ISBD(M), the process took a little more than four years from its inception in 1969 to publication of the preliminary edition in late 1971 and of the definitive edition early in 1974.

This procedure is somewhat different from that which had been in vogue for some time in the United States, where the participation of many associations and committees had become commonplace; and the time span was considerably shorter than that devoted to preparations for either RDC or AACR. During the process, ISBD had not received high visibility outside the limited circles of IFLA and national bibliographic agencies. Most of what appeared in print in North America prior to 1973 was cautiously worded in generalities, rather than offering specific details of proposed practice.⁴⁴ In Britain, a more complete description had appeared in 1971,⁴⁵ while a specific outline of ISBD appeared in *IFLA News* as early as mid-1970.⁴⁶ It was subsequently evident, however, that even the most general knowledge of implications of the developments had largely escaped the notice of practitioners and administrators in North America, who were then enveloped in the problems of automation and local network development. The library community of the United States, although never openly rebelling against a certain amount of dictation from LC, was quite unaccustomed to accepting the idea that any major cataloging advance affecting it could be initiated from abroad—after all, none had since Panizzi. There was also concern on practical grounds. Although nothing in ISBD is incompatible with the MARC II format, the prescribed punctuation pattern of ISBD would appear to have caused problems for some agencies which had already invested in computer programs designed to manipulate punctuation at the printout stage. Such concerns led to undercurrents of resentment at the imposition of yet another major change in cataloging rules once it was realized that details of all AACR rules for description would be gradually altered to conform with the various existing and forthcoming ISBDs.

The sudden transition from "Anglo-American" to "international" will take more time to be understood and absorbed by what for nearly a century has been the fiercely provincial and largely self-sufficient environment of the North American LC-user community. The brief flurry of writings resulting from the 1972-73 controversy in the

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United States did, however, belatedly draw wide attention to ISBD.⁴⁷ Fuller reporting of developments in North American publications followed. The expeditious incorporation of the provisions of ISBD(M) into several national bibliographies and into AACR (in the form of a revised Chapter 6 for each text) also served to allay uneasiness by removing uncertainty about its practical application.⁴⁸

The part of the controversy over what constitutes a "standard" and who has the authority to impose it may be considered premature in the present context, although ISO has recently adopted an outline version of ISBD(M) as an official standard.⁴⁹ The other part of the controversy concerned the substance of ISBD, and in particular: (1) the prescribed punctuation, and (2) the required scope of a description which is in principle totally independent of access points or headings. The punctuation pattern took some time to develop. It had been evident to the committees preparing AACR in the 1960s that punctuation should be prescribed more rigorously than it had been in RDC or earlier codes. The discretion allowed had led to fruitless arguments at the practical level, because punctuation was treated as a matter of style and had little or no bearing on the substance of the description. By stating that "an appendix which summarizes punctuation practices has been added"⁵⁰ in AACR, Field perhaps unconsciously admitted that once again a preferred house style became part of the code, for pragmatic reasons.

The first draft of ISBD in October 1969 is not explicit on matters of punctuation, but the germ of a new idea is already present: "it seems to me to be desirable that the Working Party should recommend a system of punctuation."⁵¹ The novelty is in the word *system*; by the next draft it was a policy that a punctuation mark should uniquely identify each element of description within its own area and that another unique mark should separate the areas.⁵² This was not easy to accomplish, and the punctuation pattern published in the 1971 preliminary edition required substantial revision (to the considerable unhappiness of many in the North American community) before publication of the first standard edition of 1974. This revision was finally accomplished after much discussion in August 1973.⁵³ In a laudable attempt to familiarize the library community with ISBD, LC had published extensive examples following the earlier version, but these have caused confusion.⁵⁴ As recently as late 1975, the obsolete pattern of punctuation appeared prominently in the literature and had to be corrected.⁵⁵ Such are the inevitable problems encountered in the attempt to settle a standard neither too slowly nor too quickly.

The punctuation pattern may constitute overkill for purposes of computer manipulation of bibliographic data, for with a single exception,* each of the ISBD(M) punctuation delimiters is duplicated by a MARC subfield code. The pattern certainly facilitates visual recognition of the parts of the entry, thus helping to fulfill the two purposes of ISBD which are unrelated to mechanization: "(1) making records from different sources interchangeable, (2) assisting in the interpretation of records across language barriers."⁵⁶

The matter of whether a description can, or should, be independent of a heading is one which raises larger issues of the context of the rules. For the unit entry catalog so firmly embedded in North American practice, it was desirable for RDC to have omitted from the description any single-author statement or publisher statement that could reasonably be inferred from the unit (or main) entry heading always accompanying that description.⁵⁷ This simplification required considerable qualification even before AACR;⁵⁸ nevertheless, so-called "repetition" of the author statement in the description, as called for in ISBD(M), has been severely criticized as contributing to an unnecessary lengthening of the catalog entry by Seymour Lubetzky.⁵⁹

It is still too early for any system of universal bibliographic control to be based on a standardized selection and form of main entry heading. Perhaps this is not even a desirable goal in view of inherent language problems. It is not unreasonable, then, that an internationally acceptable standard description should not be dependent on a heading, and therefore must include all elements—including those from which headings may be generated for retrieval purposes. If a compromise or alternative is possible in particular situations, it should be presented and accepted as such.⁶⁰

The question of whether these features of ISBD are inherently objectionable for smaller libraries or in certain local circumstances, or whether they are simply changes which can be assimilated over a period of time, remains open to investigation. Furthermore, in a computer environment divorced from the 75-year North American tradition of the unit entry, the possibilities of abridgment and manipulation of the full ISBD record for various practical uses in a library have only begun to be investigated. Such possibilities, however, remain outside the scope of this article.

*The exception is the space-semicolon-space in the statement of responsibility. Unfortunately, MARC tags and ISBD prescribed punctuation are not absolute equivalents, although their coincidence is very close, and within the majority of records either would signal the necessity for the other.

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These issues bring into focus the potentially conflicting needs of, and demands on: (1) the catalog of an individual collection, and (2) the published products of a national bibliographic agency. This conflict will not be explored here, but its mention in the context of anti-ISBD sentiment is important, because it is a conflict which has gone largely unnoticed in North America due to its near-total dependency on LC in the past. Because of the history of its unique service as provider of unit catalog entries for the world's publications, LC now finds itself in the unenviable position of having to justify to some of its clientele its role as one national bibliographic agency among many, which shares its records with the others.

Two threads remain to be followed in this skein, and they too are entangled: (1) the development of a full ISBD program from the original ISBD(M), and (2) the integration of the developing standard into specific cataloging codes. At this writing, it is fruitless to try to follow either thread to its end; both are still being woven and whatever is written now could be obsolete by the time of publication. One development is of such significance to both, however, that it merits detailed description: the development of the generalized ISBD, or ISBD(G).

As noted earlier, the original concept of a standard bibliographic description was restricted to monographs before publication in its first standard edition as ISBD(M). This restriction resulted from almost immediate pressure for the development of a parallel ISBD for serial publications, or ISBD(S). Not only do most modern descriptive cataloging codes have separate, if not contradictory, provisions for serial publications, but the recently established International Serials Data System was seeking its own means of standardizing the identification of serials. The search for a means of accommodating within this single developing standard those features of serial publications inadequately covered by a standard conceived for monographs seemed urgent. Serials and nonbook materials are the subject of other contributions to this issue; suffice it to note here that what was good for monographs and serials suddenly seemed equally desirable for cartographic materials, old or rare books, music, and nonbook materials in general. Despite the obvious cross-classification, ISBD working groups have been either formally organized or proposed for each of these categories.⁶¹ As an attempt to ensure complementary provisions in the various ISBDs, each established working group includes at least one member of the original ISBD(M) working group.⁶²

A version of ISBD(S) was published as the recommendations of its working group early in 1974,⁶³ but prolonged controversy has resulted over the conflict in serials cataloging between description and identification. No other ISBD has yet reached the stage of a preliminary published version at the date of completion of this article. In the meantime, AACR is being reexamined by a revision committee with a view to publication of a second edition. The scheduled completion date of this revision is early 1977, and the revision committee has accepted adherence to ISBD as one of its principles.⁶⁴

Early in its deliberations, the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR (JSCAACR) realized that: (1) the directions of the various specialist ISBDs were potentially in conflict, and (2) not all of them would be available before the scheduled time of completion of its own work. JSCAACR requested that the IFLA International Office for UBC convene a meeting at which its own representatives and those of each existing and proposed ISBD working group could seek agreement on an "umbrella" ISBD to serve as the framework for each specialized ISBD, and thus for all rules on description in the new edition of AACR.⁶⁵ Successful meetings were held in October 1975 and in March 1976; the details of ISBD(G) were ratified by the IFLA Council in August 1976, and publication may be expected by early 1977. Details of the proposed ISBD(G) have already appeared in several publications on both sides of the Atlantic.⁶⁶ Because the specific problems of nonmonographic publications were carefully considered in drafting this standard, ISBD(M) will probably require some modification both in terminology and (to a very minor degree) in substance in order to conform. Meanwhile, work has proceeded rapidly on other ISBDs to conform with the ISBD(G) draft, with ratification of one or more of these standards expected in 1976 or early 1977.

By the time this issue of *Library Trends* is published, the second edition of AACR may also be substantially complete in draft form and ready for testing. It will be the first cataloging code to put into effect, in the form of detailed rules, a complete ISBD structure covering all types of library materials. Other codes already exist (along with the two revisions of AACR Chapter 6) which embody the provisions of ISBD(M).⁶⁷ With a considerable number of national bibliographic services also using the basic ISBD structure, prospects for widespread application of the completed system seem bright.

Joel Downing's comments on the 1967 AACR are equally relevant

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to this developing standard for description, and strike a fitting note on which to pause in this unfinished story:

This new code has been produced painfully but not ineffectually in two national arenas. It may be argued that neither group responsible for the preparation of the rules was constituted to represent all existing views, but I am fairly certain that if fifty other librarians and cataloguers had been brought together they would probably not have produced a better set of rules—possibly a worse. It is my plea . . . that we stand to gain immeasurably by having for the first time for many decades an acceptable standard of discipline and technique in cataloguing suitable to all levels—public and special, academic and bibliographic.⁶⁸

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