

Is RDA the Only Way?
An Alternative Option Through International Cooperation
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[Thanks to everyone]

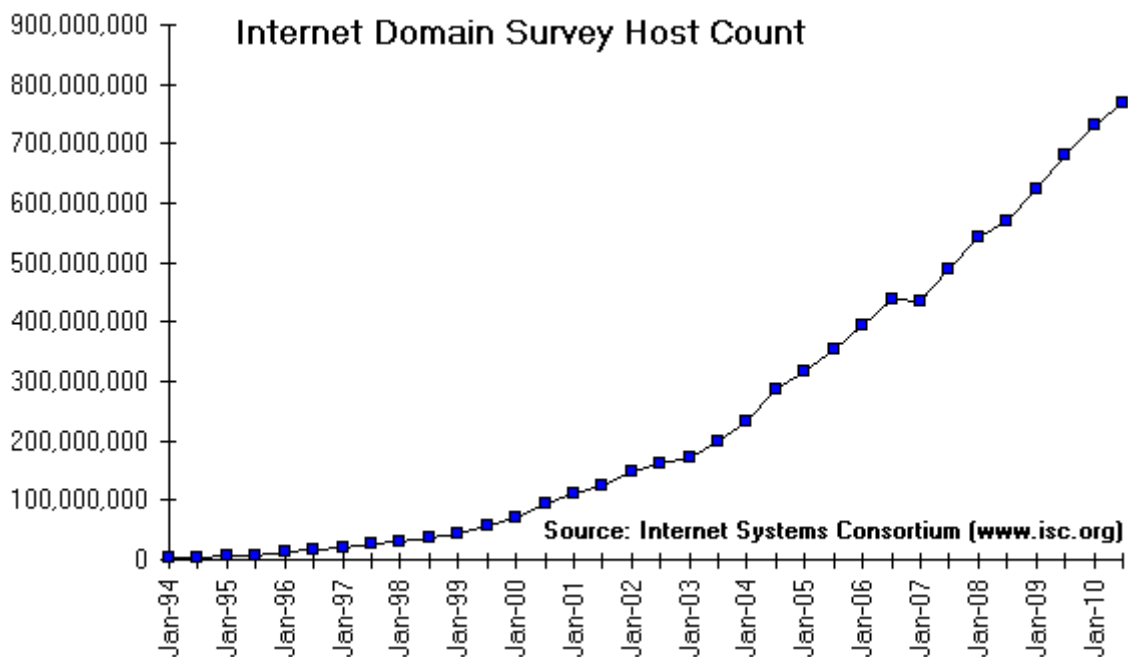
I would like to take this opportunity to discuss a few of the reasons why I decided to start the Cooperative Cataloging Rules Wiki and to do this, I must discuss the RDA and the current state of the catalog and cataloging.

What is the situation of libraries today? In spite of a few of the more optimistic notes we hear once in awhile, it appears that the situation of libraries is indeed very serious today. Today, it seems that every library is dealing with budgetary problems. In the United States, I recently read a report in the Washington Post that the economic situation is getting so serious that school districts have already eliminated most extra-curricular activities such as music and cheerleading, and are now moving to four-day school weeks, where five-day weeks have been the norm.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/in-trimming-school-budgets-more-officials-turn-to-a-four-day-week/2011/10/26/gIQABsiXQM_story_2.html

Naturally, this has had a substantial effect on families who must find day care for their children for the extra day at home, and since children are in school for longer each day, there is less time for important tasks such as homework. With severe economic and social problems such as these, along with rising unemployment, lower wages and so on and so on, it becomes difficult to argue in favor of providing more funding for libraries.

It is important to keep in mind that this was occurring even before the financial crisis. Libraries had already been facing a fundamental existential crisis for quite some time. The internet and the world wide web continue to expand and includes more and more creative and intellectual works.



<http://navigators.com/stats.html>

These materials are very often free to access, are up-to-date, and can be interactive. These new resources can be highly engaging and exciting. To younger eyes, a rather inert physical book may be much less interesting than an online resource. From my personal point of view, although I am decidedly a bookman, the incredible number of scanned books that I can download from the different scanned book projects is quite simply unbelievable to me. I wrote about this at some length in a blog posting "*Observations of a Bookman on his Initial Encounters with an Ebook Reader*"

<http://catalogingmatters.blogspot.com/2010/03/observations-of-bookman-on-his-initial.html> I am a bookman, and I absolutely love the web!

As a consequence, it is only natural that—unfortunately!--the value of printed collections are increasingly being called into question more and more.

But why? Let us take only one example of a magnificent project created by NPTEL, or the *National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning* in India, which provides online a large number of technical courses from the various Indian Institutes of Technology. For free. This is the sort of site that could change the world.

I grew up in a small town in the center of New Mexico in the United States. I was interested in technical matters. The town has a small public library, and everyone tried their best but there were few choices available for a young boy. Yet, I can say that if I had had these courses available for free at the click of a button, and if I had been disciplined enough to actually go through them, my life may have been different. <http://www.youtube.com/user/nptelhrd>.

I don't know how many courses are available, but there are a lot. Here is just one: a course on Broadband Networks given by Prof. Karandikar from Bombay. <http://www.youtube.com/user/nptelhrd#grid/user/041D7B835EA04014>. I am sure that many people would be very interested in learning the information from Prof. Karandikar, and it is also very much in the interest of society itself and the world in general that individuals should be allowed and even encouraged to learn this kind of information, so as to enhance their own possibilities and simultaneously help their communities.

But, how is someone supposed to know about this course in the first place? They can't find it through library catalogs or even in Worldcat, where there is a record for the site as a whole, but we must confess, is of very dubious worth. <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/646899485>

Therefore, if someone wanted this course, they would be forced *not* to use our catalogs, but to use other tools, so we immediately think of Google. A search there for “broadband networks” gets over 33 million hits with Wikipedia as the no. 1 result, but still no link to this excellent resource of undoubted use.

Two of Ranganathan's laws are “Every book its reader” and “Every reader his book”. Of course Ranganathan's ideas apply not only to books but can be expanded into the virtual world, including this online course in particular. How can this course be connected with the reader who needs it? Of course, this is only a single course in a single website, when there are a tremendous variety of courses available, many not available from the web itself, but through other networks such as iTunes.

Of course, it is not easy for catalogers to connect the right websites with the right readers. Why? For one thing, catalogers are already working hard dealing with connecting normal printed materials with the right readers. Since the number of printed materials have not gone down substantially, it would seem to make sense to hire more catalogers to deal with the additional materials, but because of the economic crisis, it is clear that the number of catalogers will probably not increase anytime soon, if anytime at all. It can also be argued that it is at least *possible* to find the online course on broadband electronics through Google (although not easy), while if there is a physical book in the library and it is not cataloged, there is absolutely no chance that anyone can find it.

One additional point is that the online course is free, even though more people may find it incredibly important, while the printed book cost the library money, although a much lower number of people may want it.

So, we are faced with the problem of more materials than ever before, at a time when we have fewer resources to deal with them. What has the cataloging world offered as a solution?

After many years in development, RDA has been offered as a step toward a solution for catalogs. But is it? What exactly does it offer to our patrons that is not what they have today?

In summary:

- abbreviations spelled out
- some changes in punctuation
- GMD replaced by the 33x fields
- different transcription rules
- abolishing the rule of three into the rule of one according to cataloger's discretion
- a few changes in uniform titles

How will our patrons experience these changes? Most of them I am sure they will not even notice, except as they may become aware of some inconsistencies, for example, they will see some words spelled out in full in some records as opposed to the abbreviations in other records. Patrons certainly cannot notice the differences in transcription practices. The changes in uniform titles will also be noticed only as a difference when compared to older practices, e.g. where people used to see “*Bible. N.T. Mark*” before, they will see “*Bible. Mark*” after.

People may notice the difference in the rule of three eventually, but it will take some time. I have

read that the reason for implementing this change is so that catalogers will be “free” to trace more headings. In my experience, such an assumption is simply laughable. Whenever I have cataloged something, I have actually been happy whenever I found that fourth author or corporate body and I didn't have to do so much work! I shall venture to make a prediction that because of the stresses in the budgetary realm, catalogers will be under higher pressures to raise productivity, so I believe the number of headings assigned to materials will actually go down instead of up, as so many seem to believe for some reason.

I confess that only time can tell however.

So, when we look at the actual changes that people will experience when they use the catalog, we see it is primarily in the realm of *abbreviations* and *transcription*. This is why I maintain that, in contradiction of those who claim that RDA is not about display, in actuality RDA is *primarily* about display since the main points searchers will see will be in the area of abbreviations and transcription. That is, for those people who notice any changes at all.

<http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/rdabrochureJanuary2010.pdf>

The major point mentioned in favor of RDA is that it is a step forward toward FRBR, which will let people *find, identify, select and obtain, works, expressions, manifestations and items* by their *authors, titles and subjects*. Of course, this aim invites several questions. First, is the new structure needed to allow people to do the FRBR user tasks, or have modern systems already achieved them? Let's see an example. Here is a search for Jorge Borges' *El Aleph* as found in Worldcat. With the current power of online catalogs, all of the variants of the different expressions and manifestations can currently be found and navigated when searching correctly. Here, the searcher can limit by format, by other authors, and if you see the entire record, by languages, dates, years and so on.

The screenshot shows the WorldCat search interface. At the top, the search bar contains the query 'ti:aleph au:jorge luis borges'. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Advanced Search' and 'Find a Library'. The search results are displayed in a list format. The first result is 'El Aleph' by Jorge Luis Borges, published by Alianza in 1997. The second result is 'The Aleph and other stories, 1933-1969, together with commentaries and an autobiographical essay' by Jorge Luis Borges, published by E. P. Dutton in 1970. The third result is 'Aleph' by Jorge Luis Borges. On the left side, there is a 'Format' filter menu with options like 'All Formats (107)', 'Book (99)', 'eBook (16)', etc. Below that is a 'Refine Your Search' section with 'Author' filters for 'Jorge Luis Borges (89)', 'Borges Jorge Luis (4)', and 'Julio Ortega (2)'. The search results also show 'Results 1-10 of about 107 (.34 seconds)' and navigation links like 'First', 'Prev', 'Next'.

<http://www.worldcat.org/search?q=ti%3Aaleph+au%3AJorge+luis+borges&qt=advanced&dblist=638>

But even beyond this, can we honestly proclaim that people really and truly want the FRBR user tasks, i.e. to be able distinguish all of the expressions, manifestations and items of particular works?

Is this what people want, or do they want something completely different? For instance, it occurs to me to ask that when people walk through the door of a library, what do they mainly want to do? Search the catalog?



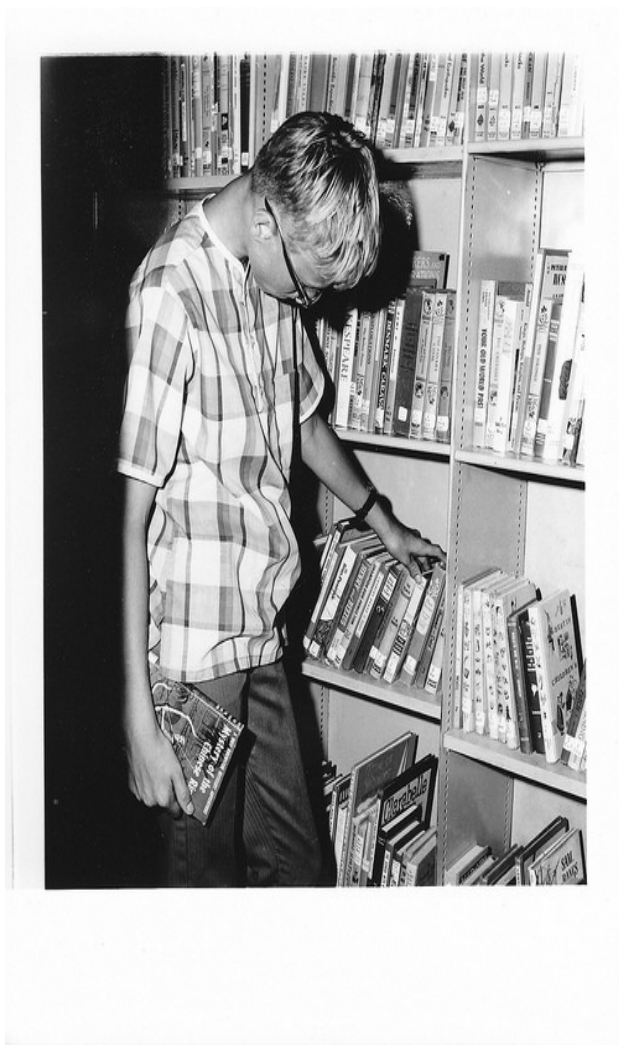
<http://www.washington.edu/home/historical/insidelib.html>

Or do they want to work with the materials by actually using them?



<http://csudigitalhumanities.org/exhibits/items/show/2363>

And by browsing them? <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whitewright/5081547011/>



I submit that what people really want is to work with the materials of the collection by reading and browsing the shelves (when it is possible). The vast majority of people have no interest whatsoever in the details of the books—the tiny differences in expressions, what is a new expression vs. a new work, the publication dates of specific manifestations, the exact number of pages, who are the publishers, and so on. When someone wants a specific bit of information, they don't care if the publisher happens to be Elsevier or Random House.

At the same time, while this information is of very little importance to our *patrons*, it is of *absolutely vital* importance for those who maintain the collection, i.e. the librarians, who must maintain a complete inventory of each item. In the past, there could not really be one catalog for the librarians and another for the patrons—everyone had to use the same tool. Computers have advanced to the point where this assumption no longer holds today, and the tool for the patron can be organized and work quite differently from that used by the collection managers.

For all of these reasons, I believe that RDA and FRBR, although very well-intentioned and initiated by excellent and sincere cataloging experts, are going in a direction very different from what is needed by our patrons. In fact, when looking at those initiatives from such a viewpoint, it turns out that they actually only continue the same methods, and have the same aims that have been found from the very beginning of catalogs. As a result, I see no reason to adopt RDA since it will not be providing anything substantially new for our patrons. It only introduces new methods for catalogers to make what is substantially the same product. What we need are products that are useful to our patrons, who now inhabit a completely new information environment.

If RDA were proven to be easier to use, simpler to train people, or it promised additional productivity, it may be worthwhile, but no one has ever suggested that it would do any of these things. In fact, creating RDA records provides additional levels of complexity (mainly in determining precisely which information belongs to which parts of the WEMI) although access remains unchanged.

So what do we do? Is there an alternative?

There is no alternative.



<http://nicentreright.wordpress.com/2010/11/20/margaret-thatcher-was-absolutely-right/>



http://soundofcannons.blogspot.com/2010_03_01_archive.html

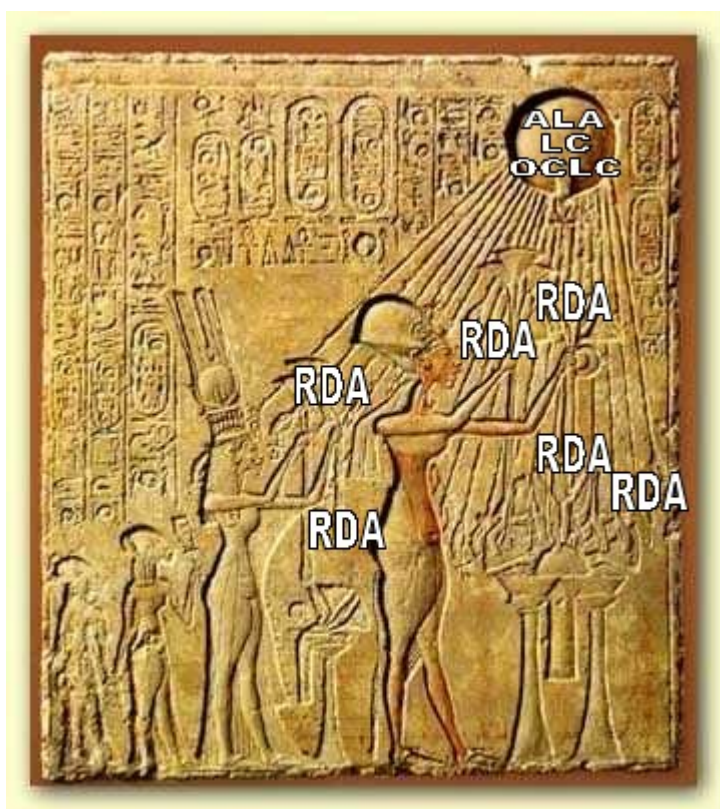


http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2011/10/13/news/parla_berlusconi-23148363/

All of these politicians claimed that there were no alternatives to their policies. Of course in reality, there were always several alternatives and each choice would have had its own consequences. In the last few years, it has become clear that the seeds of our own economic problems were within some of their policies. This is not saying that these other alternatives would have had better or worse consequences, but those politicians claimed there were no alternatives, it was untrue.

For quite a long time, it was also considered that there were no alternatives to the political regimes in the Arab countries, but all this has changed too. And surprisingly quickly.

Based on these examples, I ask: can there be an alternative to the traditional method of creating standards for cataloging; where the standards come down from on high and everyone is more or less forced to follow them, such as in this picture.



In other words, if RDA is adopted by the major libraries, do the other libraries have a choice?

I mentioned the economic difficulties earlier. These difficulties are putting even more pressure on

smaller libraries who are struggling with matters of simple survival and have no budget either for training or to pay for access to the online version of RDA. Therefore, there is very little economic sense for them to enact RDA. If there were genuine prospects for increased productivity or usefulness of the records we make, that would be one important point, but that has not been shown.

Even in the recent report "*Report and Recommendations of the U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee*" which comprised LC, NLA and NLM <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda/rdatesting-finalreport-20june2011.pdf>, the authors of the report wrote in the business case: *The test revealed that there is little discernible immediate benefit in implementing RDA alone.* and more interesting: *The Coordinating Committee wrestled with articulating a business case for implementing RDA.*

This sentence says a lot. There should certainly be no *struggle* to articulate a business case at such a late date. The business case should have been settled long ago. If those libraries cannot make a business case, other than hoping that things will eventually turn out for the best, how can anyone else even hope to formulate a credible business case?

For those libraries that conclude that RDA is the incorrect choice, they would still be under pressure to accept RDA anyway, because they could fear that AACR2 would no longer be updated and their rules would become increasingly obsolete.

These are some of the concerns why I decided to initiate the Cooperative Cataloging Rules Wiki. Since any advantages of implementing RDA are so unclear, I felt it was important to provide other libraries that either could not implement RDA, or did not want to, to have a real choice. Therefore, what was needed was something that could ensure the current rules could continue to be updated.

I want to emphasize the Cooperative Cataloging Rules wiki is ***absolutely not*** an ultimate solution to the problems facing catalogs and cataloging. Since it is also clear to me that RDA is also no solution, it seemed logical to create something that would allow the cataloging community to continue to update their current rules until real solutions are found. All the Cooperative Cataloging Rules Wiki does is create a way of maintaining the rules already in force, so keep your AACR2!

There are other initiatives as well. Two sites I will mention that are very interesting are the *Yee Cataloging Rules* of Martha Yee <http://yeerules.wikidot.com/> and the *MRI Rules* of J. MacRee Elrod and Michael Gorman <http://special-cataloguing.com/mris>

If the Cooperative Cataloging Rules Wiki constitutes a revolution, it is probably one of the more conservative revolutions that have been attempted. It respects the work that has been done on RDA. RDA has been undertaken by skilled and experienced catalogers who are highly motivated. Unfortunately, I feel their efforts have been misdirected.

The ultimate goal of the Cooperative Cataloging Rules Wiki are a bit on the radical side. It does not declare that no changes are needed, but rather that the changes needed are much deeper and far more profound than the superficial changes suggested by RDA. In addition, these changes can come from the cataloging community as a whole, instead of being decided by a few libraries in the most important libraries and trickling down to everyone else. The entire Web2.0 movement allows these sorts of grass-level initiatives now and all kinds of new tools can be built.

Think about joining and becoming a part of one of these initiatives.

Thank you.