Some Authority Control Issues in Public Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone in the throes of a discussion about or a local implementation of online authority control has probably experienced a sensation similar to that of Alice and the Red Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*. The pair were running so fast that their feet barely touched the ground, yet when they stopped to rest, Alice noticed that in spite of their effort, the scenery hadn't changed. The Red Queen responded: " '. . . you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.' "[1] If a library has attempted authority control with paper files and feels overwhelmed by that effort, it is entirely possible that they will be even more overwhelmed by a move to an online file. In the early days of library automation, many people erroneously assumed that a computer would reduce the work loads, and thus the staffing levels, of technical services departments. Such dreams have remained simply dreams for most libraries. The new reality is that if online authority control is fully implemented, then libraries may need additional staff, not less.

BACKGROUND

To provide the reader with some understanding of my approach to the topic of authority control, permit me to review some of Charles Cutter's ideas, taken in their final form from the preface to the fourth edition of his *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog*. Even after 88 years, Cutter's concepts about access points still seem applicable to the purposes of most libraries. Cutter saw users looking for information in two ways: (1) by specific, known elements such as an author, a title, or a subject—what Cutter labeled the "finding function" of a catalog and (2) by general, broad categories such as what works of an author are available, or what is available on a subject, or what different kinds of literature are available—what Cutter called the "gathering function" of a catalog.[2] By controlling how information is entered in the access points which perform those functions, i.e., by using authorized and unauthorized headings, libraries have attempted to maximize the amount of usable material that a patron retrieves during a catalog search. Through a liberal use of cross

references from unauthorized to authorized headings and from authorized headings to related authorized headings, libraries try to direct patrons to usable information with the least amount of staff intervention needed.

At the Allen County Public Library, online authority control looms on the horizon, but the reality is that there is much groundwork to be laid before authority control can be implemented. Our manual authority files were abandoned several years ago. In order to create authority records quickly for some of the titles on our magnetic tapes we decided to use a commercial vendor. Before we began loading our database, copies of only the adult non-fiction MARC records were stripped from our magnetic tapes and sent to Blackwell North America for verification of names and subjects. In addition to "fixing" information within the bibliographic record, Blackwell either located a matching LC authority record or created an authority record for local headings. Until parameters for both the authority records and for the public access catalog have been established on our CLSI system, we cannot load those authority records which were created for us. An additional wrinkle is that the CLSI/OCLC interface currently is not capable of downloading authority records from OCLC to our own database. This means that all "new" titles that have been cataloged since ACPL stopped its OCLC tape subscription in February 1989 may need to be re-evaluated at some point in the future and necessary authority records added to the local system by re-keying the information found in the LC authority files. In addition, authority records for the adult fiction and juvenile titles will need to be added manually since bibliographic records for neither of these portions of the collection were

sent to Blackwell.

Each type of library—special, university, public, school—will have its own unique set of issues to deal with when faced with the idea of authority control. The remainder of this paper will focus on some issues that face ACPL. It is always easier to raise these issues than it is to solve them, and this paper is no exception. The answers lie ahead.

Cross References

Public libraries have the most disparate patrons of any type of library. The majority of users are not sophisticated at using a catalog—regardless of whether it's in card or online form. One ongoing criticism in the use of many LC subject headings is that the headings often aren't appropriate for the generalist patrons who frequent public libraries. To compound the problem, helpful cross references aren't always given. Library literature abounds with stories about this particular issue. Try looking up the French Foreign Legion in the latest edition of LCSH. The authorized heading is "France. Armee. L'estrange." There is no cross reference for the unauthorized, but more commonly known English equivalent, French Foreign Legion.

Establishment of Names

Another of Charles Cutter's principles, which was lost in the shuffle many Anglo-American cataloging rules ago, deserves renewed attention: "Choose that entry that will probably be first looked under by the class of people who use the library."[3] In other words, why not put things where most people would expect to find them?

This principle seems particu-

larly important with regard to the large portions of a public library collection which have traditionally been browsing collections—fiction, much of the juvenile collection, and biographies. Regardless of the kind of catalog, many patrons don't use the catalog to access these collections. So, no matter how many cross references are made, patrons are not going to find material that is not placed on the shelves where they expect to find it.

Many public libraries wrestled with this issue prior to AACR2. The rules dictated that all the titles by Jean Plaidy, Philippa Carr and Victoria Holt be entered in the catalog under the "real" name of the author— Eleanor Hibbert—rather than under any of her pseudonyms. Since fiction books are traditionally shelved according to the author's last name, all of the titles by Jean Plaidy, Philippa Carr and Victoria Holt ended up in the "H's" under Hibbert. The scenario seems entirely possible that a patron looking for books by Jean Plaidy entered the library, located the "P's" in the fiction section, and, on finding no books on the shelves, erroneously assumed that either (1) the library had none of Jean Plaidy's books, or (2) all the library's copies of all Jean Plaidy's books were checked out. In either case the patron might well have left the library disgruntled, not realizing that he/she should have checked the catalog where a cross reference card would have led them from Plaidy to Hibbert or that he/she should have asked a librarian who would also have re-directed the search.

Along with belated implementation of AACR2 in January 1984 ACPL also began a policy change about establishment of names: the name on the title page became the authorized form regardless of what LC

had designated as such. Not until the summer of 1988, however, did we attempt to deal with the fiction titles that needed to be relabeled and subsequently reshelved in order that the books and the 100 field of the MARC records matched. Extra summer staff was able to handle about three-fourths of the material at the Main Library.

Because of this decision about establishment of names—a decision that had the greatest impact on fiction, both adult and juvenile, we did not want to risk losing these names in the course of authority work. For example, at the time our records were being examined by Blackwell, all the bibliographic records for books by Victoria Holt would have been flipped to Jean Plaidy as the predominant pseudonym. Victoria Holt would have appeared in the authority record for Plaidy as a 400 field, i.e., a "Found under" reference back to Plaidy. [Note: in the CLSI system, 400 fields, traditionally thought of a "See" references display as "Found under" references; 500 fields, traditionally "See also" references display as "Also found under" references.] For this reason the adult fiction and all juvenile titles did not go through Blackwell's authority validation.

Making the decision about title page names solved several problems: (1) patrons could browse and find materials where they expected the materials to be; (2) processing staff no longer spent inordinate amounts of time tracking down the "real" name of an author; and (3) processing staff no longer had to change the spines of books, since the author we had chosen and the author on the piece were no longer in conflict with one another. In addition, it seems that our decision has now become that of the revised AARC2, at

least with regard to contemporary authors.

However, new problems have arisen that we must deal with on a case by case basis. Changes in personal names continue to be problematic, particularly in fiction. Even trying to make decisions using the yardstick question: "Where is the public most likely to look for this?" becomes sticky when dealing with a title like *Trevayne*. The hard cover edition of the title was published in 1973 under the pseudonym Jonathan Ryder, but the paperback edition, published several years later, appeared under the author's real name, Robert Ludlum. There is a similar problem with Clemens/Twain. Ninety-nine percent of the books in ACPL's collection have title pages listing the author as Mark Twain. But there is that problematic 1% which have Samuel Clemens on the title page. No easy solution is apparent. Based on our decision, books can be shelved by what actually appears on the title page. That splits the copies of *Huckleberry Finn* into two separate areas of the stacks—the majority of copies in the "T's" with a few copies in the "C's." The authorized heading for Twain must be altered so that the cross reference for Clemens is changed from a 400 field (Found under) to a 500 field (Also found under). In addition, an authority record for Clemens must also be created with the appropriate 500 field. The other alternative is to use Twain as the authorized heading and physically alter the spines of the books bearing the name Clemens to reflect the authorized name. Only one authority record would be required and no alteration would have to be made to the LC authority record.

An equally frustrating if less prevalent problem occurs with some transliterated names. For most standard names there is now a standard, transliterated spelling—a spelling that even LC now uses. So Tchaikovsky and Chekov have settled firmly into place. With current names, however, a person's name may be transliterated by one publisher with one spelling and by another publisher with another spelling. In most cases, the variant spellings do not alter the initial letter of the name and thus the shelving may not be as dramatically affected as might have been the case in some instances, as with Tchaikovsky and Chaikovskii, for example.

A final issue concerning fiction names that has implications for authority control is those books whose title pages read "Someone as someone else." In some cases these names reflect the "real" name and a pseudonym, e.g., Charlotte MacLeod writing as Alisa Craig. In other cases these names reflect two pseudonyms, e.g., Ursula Bloom as Sheila Burns. Which should be considered the author? Should both names be established as authorized headings with appropriate 500 (Also found under) fields? Many writers indicate that this duality of names is to alert readers to a particular kind of "voice." If that is the case, then perhaps the name following the "as" is the appropriate name for the 100 field.

Subject Headings

Besides the difficulties with determining authorized name headings, particularly in fiction, another major difficulty in online authority control which is more likely to occur in public libraries is that of how to merge two different sets of subject headings—those used for adult and those used for juvenile materials. With card catalogs a library was able to utilize more than one source of subject

headings but isolate each source by catalog. As long as this information remained separate, the integrity of subject headings could be maintained within each catalog. At ACPL all the adult catalogs in the system contained LC adult subject headings. All the juvenile catalogs contained subjects that were generated through LC's Annotated Card Program. Many adult and juvenile subject headings overlap, but there are a number of discrepancies as well. Take for example, the juvenile subject heading for mystery books "Mystery and detective stories." In the LCSH "Mystery and detective stories" is not an authorized subject heading; instead "Detective and mystery stories" is the authorized heading. In an automated online catalog many public libraries experience difficulty in attempting to support more than one set of subject headings, so a decision must be made about whether the authorized heading for all material in the database, adult or juvenile, should be "Mystery and detective stories" or "Detective and mystery stories." If the decision is made to establish both as authorized subject headings, then the "Found under" (400 fields) will need to be changed to "Also found under" (500 fields) in both authority records. For users who are familiar with subject headings from the card catalogs, having both sets of headings would allow patrons to sort out the juvenile from the adult titles they retrieve in a search. But for users who are unfamiliar with such subject headings, having both headings means searching twice to see all the similar genre titles. In either case, some manipulation of authority records is necessary in order to create the references and give the access needed by the patron.

The final broad category of materials that may wreak havoc with an online authority control system is those special collections in a library which may have been assigned local, non-standard (i.e., non LC) subject headings. In the case of ACPL this is the case in our genealogy and local history collection. About 80% of the subject headings created for the genealogy card catalog are local headings. Adhering to Cutter's gathering function, the old LC reverse geographic subject headings are used to gather all information, regardless of the topic, under the place name qualified by its next larger geographic unit. So, all materials dealing with Madison County, Indiana, are entered as a local heading which begins Madison County (Ind.) and is then subdivided, usually topically. Because the whole collection is accessed in large part by non-standard subject headings, authority records for these headings will not exist—ever—on OCLC or through any other service that supplies only LC headings. If the time arrives when authority records can be downloaded to our CLSI system, that fact will have little impact on the authority work necessary for this special collection. All the authority records will have to be keyed from scratch into our CLSI Authority File.

Decisions Ahead

Out of this apparent chaos come some decisions that ACPL (and other libraries) will need to address. First, whenever official, authorized headings are altered (specifically LC headings), the local authority control system will require more staff to evaluate and maintain these alterations than would be required if no alterations had been made. Is the library willing and financially able to support these alterations with adequate resources?

Second, does the library plan

to create and maintain authority records for every name and subject heading that exists in its database, or can the library operate just as effectively by creating authority records only for those headings that require cross references or that require notes to explain or distinguish seemingly duplicate headings from one another? What can the library afford initially? What can it afford in ongoing maintenance costs? (These costs would include not only the requisite number of staff but also the requisite number of terminals—both OCLC and local-system terminals.)

Third, if the library is using local headings for any part of its collection, does the library have adequate support in staff, number of terminals, etc., to continue this practice? Typing an authority card for a paper file takes less skill and time and less sophisticated equipment than creating a complete authority record online.

Fourth, who is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the online authority file? In the past at ACPL, the paper authority files were created by processing staff who followed instructions given them by cataloging staff. Is this division of labor still an appropriate use of staff in an online environment?

Fifth, who is responsible for dealing with exception reports or discrepancy reports generated by many local systems? These reports isolate bibliographic records recently added to the database that contain unauthorized headings. Can these discrepancies be resolved by clerical staff, or paraprofessional staff, or do they require the attention of a professional catalog librarian?

Sixth, if authority records are purchased from a commercial vendor, does the library plan to evaluate those records and make modifications *en masse* or wait until specific problems arise in the course of daily operations and then deal with the problems at that time?

Final Thoughts

Libraries have wrestled with authority control for years in attempting to maintain card catalogs. The assumption that an online catalog will make authority control easier because of a capability like global change is generally erroneous. If a library had difficulty maintaining authority control in the card catalog—primarily because of inadequate resources to support this function—the same library will probably have difficulty maintaining authority control online. Simply loading authority records into a local library system does not guarantee any kind of practical or easy authority control. There will still be a need for a great deal of human intervention and decision making in order to tailor, as much as possible, the catalog's access points to the users of that catalog.

Footnotes

[1]Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass (London: Dean & Son, n.d.), p. 109.

[2]Charles A. Cutter, Rules for A Dictionary Catalog, 4th ed., rewritten (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 5.

[3]Ibid., p. 6.