

SECTION THREE: NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ATLA TECHNICAL SERVICES SECTION

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MY EXPERIENCE WITH RDA: PART ONE: OVERVIEW

The publication of RDA (Resource Description and Access) in June 2010 marked the end of a long process of development and the beginning of a period of testing and evaluation to assess the usability of RDA as a descriptive standard for cataloging in the 21st century. In the United States, the official RDA test was carried out by the three national libraries (Library of Congress, National Library of Medicine, National Library of Agriculture) and 24 Test partners, representing a range of cataloging systems, OPACs, communication formats/schemas and types of materials cataloged. Below are some general insights and reflections resulting from my participation in the test as a cataloger at Emory University, one of the national test institutions.

The development of RDA began in 2004 as an initiative to revise AACR2, which had constituted the standard for bibliographic description since 1978. Since the quarter century that lay between these two dates also witnessed the most significant advancements in information technology since the invention of movable type printing more than 500 years earlier, it quickly became evident that a mere “revision” would be an inadequate response to the many new challenges facing today’s catalogers.

One of the most important questions for catalogers is to what extent our everyday work will change if RDA were to be adopted as a national standard. On the one hand, the changes are not very big: MARC is still the main data format used for cataloging, Connexion is still the chief software environment for original cataloging in OCLC and a good number of the descriptive rules will remain the same as before. There are some new MARC fields to be learned, some new principles governing the use abbreviations and the like and—significantly for catalogers at theological libraries—the use of O.T. and N.T. in subject heading for individual books of the Bible is discontinued. However, these are hardly revolutionary changes.

On the other hand, RDA requires a new way of thinking about information architecture. The most important innovations of RDA are its logical bases of FRBR (Functional Requirement for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data). The FRBR hierarchy of Work-Expression-Manifestation-Item is becoming increasingly familiar to catalogers as are the terms content, media and carriers, which are intended to replace GMDs (General Material Designators) and should allow for a more granular description of the material cataloged without qualifying the record’s main title statement.

AACR2 cataloging essentially yields a series of individual bibliographic descriptions at the Manifestation level with provisions for items and descriptors for controlled, uniform data, pertaining to author, title or series. A representative image for such a series of individual bibliographic descriptions is the linear arrangement of printed library cards in a card catalog, which has itself become a thing of the past. The central principle in FRBR, FRAD and RDA

on the other hand is the description of relationships between the components of bibliographic data with qualifiers such as translation, adaptation, analysis, parody, etc. for titles of works or such as author, translator, illustrator, etc. for persons associated with a work, expression or manifestation. A representative image for such a dynamic web of relationships is the online environment in which most catalogers now practice their craft and to which the majority of patrons turn for information.

The final test of RDA will be its usability in a software environment that can make full use of FRBR structures and so far no major ILS vendor has offered this capability, but it is reasonable to assume that the development of such systems would follow shortly after a decision is made by the national libraries regarding the implementation of RDA. Furthermore, the structure and logic of RDA with its increased emphasis on relationships and greater use of metadata components promises to provide greater adaptability for future technological developments, even beyond the MARC environment.

Next issue: MY EXPERIENCE WITH RDA: PART TWO: EXAMPLES

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RDA WORKSHOP

Technical Services at Westminster Theological Seminary Library plans to prepare for implementation of RDA in the following manner: May 9-10, 2011, in conjunction with Southeastern Pennsylvania Theological Library Association (SEPTLA), Westminster Theological Seminary will host a two-day educational workshop with guest lecturer, Armin Siedlecki, Head of Cataloging, Pitts Theological Seminary, Emory University, an official RDA test site.

May 9, 2011
SEPTLA meeting at Westminster Theological Seminary
Morning session (75 min.): Cataloging with RDA

RDA is more than an updated set of cataloging rules. Based on the principles of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records), RDA presents a new way of thinking about organizing information. This presentation will explore the changes that catalogers can expect in their daily work as a result of the implementation of RDA. Special emphasis will be given to issues concerning catalogers in theological libraries.

Afternoon session (90 min.): RDA – Not Just for Catalogers
RDA (Resource Description and Access) is a new descriptive standard for cataloging. Based on new ways of organizing information, this innovation in bibliographic description relates not only to the world of technical services. This presentation will explore the impact of RDA on libraries, librarians and library users.