

International Unification of Cataloging?

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WHENEVER at special occasions the question of international unification of cataloging rules has arisen, professional librarians concerned with these problems have stated, almost unanimously, that a world-wide agreement in this field is practically impossible. One of the special reasons given is the basic difference between the Anglo-American system and the practice as prevailing in the German-speaking countries. Occasion for such discussions was offered at the time when we were told about the successful unification of English and American cataloging rules, brought about by the cooperation of the large library associations of the two countries in 1908, and later again, when in connection with the German Gesamtkatalog the problem of a uniform set of rules for German research libraries entered the decisive state, and finally when a uniform trade bibliography in cooperation with the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig was contemplated. Usually the discussions ended with the skeptical statement, it would be premature

to tackle such utopian plans, if there ever should be any need to take up such problems at all.

But not only the librarians of German-speaking countries showed this skeptical attitude toward international unification of cataloging rules. Even an organization such as the International Federation of Library Associations charged specifically with international relations in the library field and expected to encourage such developments, has treated this problem with a certain hesitation and resignation. Nevertheless, the question formed a regularly recurring feature in the program of discussions. In the last prewar meeting of the International Library Committee (Netherlands, July 1939) the reporting member of the Subcommittee on Uniform Catalogue Rules, K. D. Metcalf, stated as main task of the committee for the time being to study the cataloging rules of the various countries, to make them accessible by translations, and to compare them.

This task was splendidly performed by J. C. M. Hanson in his painstaking analysis of 19 different sets of rules which is the main contents of his book, *A Comparative Study of Cataloging Rules Based on the Anglo-American Code of 1908*, Chicago, 1939. As to the final goal, the creation of uniform internationally acceptable cataloging rules, Mr. Metcalf had made in 1939 the following rather conservative statement: "It will, however, take many years before such a goal can be looked on as more than idealistic."

¹ This article was written in 1947 for the "Festschrift" in honor of the 25 years' jubilee of Dr. Josef Biek, director general of the Austrian National Library. The "Festschrift" is entitled *Die Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* and has been published by H. Bauer-Verlag, Vienna 1948. The English version is reproduced with special permission of the publisher. The original text has been thoroughly revised and in some parts modified and expanded, since in the immediate postwar period, when this article was written, Austria was practically cut off from the world outside and the author had to base his statements on very fragmentary sources of information. The English translation is due to Johannes L. Dewton, of the Library of Congress, whose help is greatly appreciated by the author.

This suggests the question: What will internationally uniform cataloging accomplish? One of the main objectives of the supporters of uniform cataloging certainly is the international exchange and use of printed catalog cards, as practiced for many years within a national scope by the marvelous system of card distribution service of the Library of Congress in Washington. Within German-speaking countries the cards of the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig had been a promising step in this direction, taken shortly before the war. Add to this the greater ease for the creation of bibliographical central catalogs, union catalogs, etc., and the potentialities in case the book trade would join the international norms of descriptive cataloging. Thus a world of fascinating prospects opens for the future. We will concede that all this sounds rather utopian if international application is intended. One should realize, however, that the Anglo-Saxon librarians had to fight for unification against an overwhelming pessimism, and that the Prussian cataloging instructions had to overcome enormous resistance and difficulties before being more or less generally accepted in German-speaking countries. Thus one cannot deny the possibility that a unification on a world-wide scale could be accomplished with patience and steadfastness. Even if this goal would never be reached completely, partial progress toward it would mean much. Even within the linguistically homogeneous groups mentioned before a complete integration has not taken place. It may be conceded that the older generation of librarians can hardly hope to see the creation or the general acceptance of internationally uniform cataloging rules. But should that prevent us from trying everything to lead the coming generation on a way which will facilitate its professional work tremendously and will form a bypath, not quite unimportant, toward

peaceful international understanding? Certainly, these thoughts are "idealistic" according to Metcalf's expression, but of a type of—I might say—"practical idealism," without which a successful activity of librarians is unthinkable.

But where are the main difficulties which must be overcome, if a solution acceptable to all parts should be found for the problem of unification? As far as catalog cards for works of personal authors are concerned, interfiling of cards of foreign origin involves no particular problem. The situation is different in the case of so called "anonymous" writings. Here, indeed, lies a great stumbling block which has been recognized in its importance, but which has not been removed yet. The great antagonism dividing this particular field of cataloging technique can be expressed as follows: on one side preference of "corporate" authorship, combined with mechanical title arrangement according to the first word not being an article; on the other side preference of title entries according to the catchword system (usually the first noun in the nominative case).

That, schematically, is the main difference, so often discussed, between the Anglo-American cataloging technique, as codified in the *Catalog Rules* of 1908 (abbreviated *C.R.*) and the practice of the German-speaking countries, as expressed in a representative form in the *Prussian Instructions* (Pr. I.).²

First some basic remarks concerning the question of corporate bodies. There is nothing to be said against the extension of the term authorship, already used in a rather wide sense in the Pr. I., from physical individuals to legal persons. To do so is no contradiction to logic. And even if it would be against logic, it would not matter. One should not overestimate the im-

² The complete title reads: *Instruktionen für die alphabetischen Kataloge der preussischen Bibliotheken vom 10. Mai 1899.* (Various editions)

portance of formal logic in judging on problems of cataloging technique. The practical aspect of the rule, especially from the user's viewpoint, is alone deciding. Even the Pr. I. recognized legal personality as principle of entry in one case: Section 60, dealing with sales catalogs and prospectuses of commercial firms, provides entry under the name of the firm.

But the main point of criticism repeatedly raised by German critics of the *C.R.* is the complexity and diversity of the rules for corporate authorship. The basic principles are simple, easily learned and remembered, but there are too many exceptions and special rules. And, indeed, one can not always see compelling reason for the individual rule, even considering the peculiarities of Anglo-Saxon institutions and of the English language. The leading idea behind the principle of corporate authorship was evidently to find the one term on the "anonymous" title page most easily noticed and remembered by the user—certainly a reasonable and sound thought! In the case of government documents one will probably know the country and frequently the government agency. In the case of smaller administrative agencies one might remember the geographical unit or the place name. Institutions connected with a locality are probably remembered by the place. Societies, corporations, conferences, international bodies, etc., are most easily remembered by their official names. These considerations make the *C. R.* formulate three basic principles, which might roughly be formulated as follows:

1. Government publications are entered under the country (province, city), followed by the name of the agency.

2. Institutions, i.e., entities clearly connected with a locality, are entered under place, followed by the name of the institution.

3. Societies, in the widest sense, are en-

tered and filed under the first word of their official name.

A fourth rather inhomogeneous group, called "miscellaneous bodies," are treated separately. They are a group made up of bodies which do not belong to any of the groups mentioned above, as for example congresses, exhibitions, expeditions, firms, etc.

Exceptions from these three rules are hardly avoidable. To give an illustration: nobody would look for American private universities like Harvard or Yale under the place name Cambridge or New Haven. On the other hand, the state universities, the so-called land grant colleges, are generally known so well under the name of the state that the place name, which would be the entry required by the basic rule, is of no significance. These exceptions confirm the principle, to choose the commonly used and therefore generally remembered term as entry. There are also less successful solutions, as for example in the rather difficult field of laws, foreign treaties and constitutions. In these cases the name of the country should be followed by the governmental agency issuing. But frequently it is impossible to find out the agency. To keep this material together, the compilers of *C. R.* decided to disregard the basic rule and to use a method which is in fact alien to an author catalog and is borrowed from the principles which are followed in subject catalogs. All laws are entered under the country, followed by the standardized term: "*Laws, statutes, etc.*" This artificial grouping has its practical advantage, but it is arbitrary and must be "learned." One cannot expect that the average user³ is prepared to keep such a rule in mind.

Everybody who has worked with the *C. R.* finds the greatest difficulty in solv-

³ Always under consideration of eventual international application of cataloging rules.

ing the problem: "institution" or "society." In the individual case a decision is frequently very difficult or cannot be made at all. First of all the names given in the original publications frequently designate the character and legal statute of the corporate body involved in such a vague and even misleading manner that detailed enquiries as to the true nature of the "society" or "institution" are necessary. The term "institute" is frequently used for entities which are, according to their nature, societies. Consider the usage of the term "academy." Learned societies, but also schools, museums, etc., can be concealed under this term. There are also doubtful cases whenever an organization shows the characteristics of both institution and society at the same time. To make things still worse, the organization might also have the character of a government agency. Such cases occur frequently among the many semiofficial organizations of authoritarian governments. There it is often quite impossible to distinguish between government agencies, institutions and societies. Certainly, cross references do help in practice and are therefore used by the *C. R.* more frequently than European catalogers are used to.

The treatment of periodicals also causes doubt. The entry under the first word of the title except the article is the basic rule; but in certain cases the entry is under the corporate author. For example, the entry for the annual report of a government agency takes this form: Canada. Forest Service. Annual report; or, the proceedings of a society: Academy of Political Science. Proceedings. The reason for deviation from the basic rule is obvious. There are hundreds of annual reports and of proceedings, and one needs to know the name of the issuing agency. Why not make the best of it and emphasize the sig-

nificant term? But in this case, too, it is very difficult to draw a clear and correct distinguishing line which would be also intelligible for the user. An improvement could be found by distinguishing between periodicals with general designations as "Mitteilungen," "Bulletin," "Comptes rendues," etc., in connection with the name of the issuing organization, and periodicals with specific names whose titles include information as to the contents or some other characteristic designation.

The question is now whether it will be possible to remove these various weak spots of the *C. R.* without sacrificing the practical and useful principle of corporate authorship. Such a reform would involve the removal of the artificial and impractical dividing line between institutions and societies. One should consider entering local societies in the same way as institutions, under the place; national societies, like government agencies, under country. Geographical designations are best remembered and least complicated by synonyms. The question, to be solved in an international set of rules, of which language to accept for the names of countries and places, could be answered best by choosing the vernacular of the region concerned, as has been done in international railroad time tables. Certainly, such a rule is not always comfortable. The official name of the country might be less well known, as for instance, Eire for Ireland, Suomi for Finland. But in the interest of international application this little inconvenience—easily repaired by cross references—must be tolerated.

A general exception from this rule seems quite justified for all institutions and societies whose official names begin with a proper name (for example, as mentioned before, the Harvard and Yale Universities, or the Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft, etc.), because in these cases

the proper name, mnemonically, is stronger than the place name. The value of the entry word as a help for the memory, after all, is the deciding factor.

With these few sketchy rules the greater part of corporate entries would be disposed of. Still, there remain the organizations which cannot be very well connected with any locality: the Catholic Church, the International Red Cross, and in general the majority of the world-wide organizations and institutions. One is tempted to follow the method of mnemonics and to enter under the significant word. But the two organizations just mentioned demonstrate already the difficulties in deciding which is the significant word. Where would the layman user of the catalog look first, under Catholic or Church, under Red or Cross or International? One recognizes that we are lost in the ocean of subjective conjecture. It seems advisable indeed to follow the Anglo-American system: entry under the first word (not being an article) of the best known name.

This example leads us to a further great difficulty in international unification. How should the genuinely anonymous writings be treated, after the corporate authors are disposed of? The Anglo-Saxons have the single and simple rule to enter under the first word of the title, even if it is an adjective or a preposition. In the German-speaking countries it is customary to enter under the first noun in the nominative case followed by other catch words. A large set of special rules governs the selection and correct order of these words. The German librarian is completely familiar with these rules, by continuous usage. It is certainly possible to learn these rules. The unbiased judge, however, will find them quite complicated and theoretical. We admit, they harmonize with subtle philological principles and represent a master-

piece of German scholarly thoroughness, but how about the practical result for the general public? Can anybody really claim that the governing noun (often referred to as "substantivum regens") is always the most significant word of the title? Not to mention that the sequence of words, as arranged according to the Pr. I. rules, frequently turns out to be quite odd. To illustrate—in the catalog of a large library you find as title heading the following sequence of words (in English): Government Spanish axis. The nonlibrarian will be disturbed and believe it an error until he reads the full title, "The Spanish government and the axis." But even then the layman will hardly understand how the cataloger ever arrived at this peculiar sequence of words.

Leaving aside the difficulty of disposing of a traditional habit in vogue for many decades in many great libraries, there is no real advantage in sticking to the "Ordnungswort" rules contained in Pr. I. If one considers the further complications involved by the application of the Pr. I. principle—as evidenced by the long set of rules specifically designed for treating "Sachtitel"—the balance of arguments is decidedly in favor of the simple Anglo-American technique which implies a single, easily remembered rule. The latter may be called a mechanical device and is certainly lacking a logical foundation, but it is the only practical solution of the problem.

Do these suggestions open the way for the compilation of an internationally uniform set of cataloging rules based on the revised *C. R.*? We can answer this question in the affirmative only when the librarians of the German-speaking and some other Continental European countries can be expected to make the heavy sacrifice to give up their treatment of anonymous writings and accept both corporate authorship and me-

chanical title entries. This author realizes the implications of such a step by many Continental European librarians. An enormous amount of thinking and work expended in the creation and application of the Pr. I. through many years would be lost, the tradition of generations of librarians would break off. The continuation of such great undertakings as the *Gesamtkatalog*, just begun, would suffer under the split between old and new techniques of cataloging. But we must not forget that all living matter tends toward renewal. Library work, too, is growing organically. Tradition should not prevent shedding an old, outworn garment and drawing a line to separate us from the outdated past. Is the time ripe for that? No general reply is possible. Each library will have to find its own answer independently. In every library, however, there arrives eventually the day when a new start is unavoidable. And has not the day for a new start arrived already among the ruins of Europe, where so many libraries are destroyed and have to start reconstruction *ex fundamentis*?

It may be worth while to say a few words on the geopolitical situation of the library world, if I may use this expression. We talked of an Anglo-American cataloging technique. Accurately speaking, the zone of influence of the *C. R.* surpasses the English-speaking world by far. We know that Romance countries have introduced corporate authorship many years ago (independent from the *C. R.*) so that a change to the *C. R.* will come easily there. The same tendency is shown by the young, promising libraries of Latin America. American library influence is strongly felt in Scandinavian countries, especially in Denmark and Norway.

As to corporate authorship there is now even a tendency to favor it in German libraries, while the National Library of

Bern is so far the only library which has adopted them in Switzerland (in its new unpublished rules).

It is also quite important that a group of international institutions in Europe (League of Nations, International Labor Office, International Institute of Agriculture) has accepted the Anglo-American rules long before the United Nations or Unesco existed. Even a venerable library with a long tradition, the Vaticana, has accepted Anglo-American cataloging technique in its principles and in many details in the *Norme per il catalogo degli stampati*, thus creating the most modern, comprehensive and detailed set of rules of recent years. Most significant and—from the viewpoint of world politics—highly surprising is the fact that Soviet Russia remodeled its cataloging technique according to Anglo-American principles. This occurred within the authoritarian reorganization of her cultural life, in spite of strong counter tendencies which, for some time, pointed in favor of the Pr. I. We must admit that under these circumstances the stronghold formerly held by central Europe has also been lost in this nonpolitical field. Is it dishonorable to join an overwhelming majority, if only practical things are concerned and no loss of ideological values is involved, and if finally a compromise will bring advantages to all parties concerned?

In considering the pros and cons of the radical change we propose one should be careful not to be influenced by emotional sentiments or by considerations of national pride or prestige. Library service is simply a matter of practical utility. It is not the law per se (in our case the cataloging rules) that matters, but its usefulness and practicability for the average library user. Therefore the librarian, as the politician, must accept a realistic, and that means in

our days to some extent, a cosmopolitan point of view.

The body which is in a position to approach the problems outlined above ex officio is the International Federation of Library Associations. One of its subcommittees is in charge of the unification of cataloging rules. It is gratifying to find in one of the recent reports on the activities of this committee written by J. Ansteinsson, librarian, Technical Institute Library, Trondheim, Norway, an evaluation of the international cataloging situation which stresses the same points, hints at the same difficulties and intimates a similar approach to a solution as the writer of this article has done quite independently.⁴

It is also pleasant to know clearly from a former report of the International Committee of Libraries⁵ that everywhere, and especially in the United States, the interest in cataloging problems has grown considerably within recent years. A new healthy self-criticism of methods has gained space. How significant, that in a paper by J. C. M. Hanson, the Nestor among American cataloging experts, who himself has worked on the creation of the *C. R.* in an influential position, after a long experience and at the end of his career, frankly confesses that he is in doubt whether the standard rules for corporate authorship really constitute a perfect solution of this difficult problem. Hanson regrets—so we read in A. D. Osborn's report on *Cataloging Developments in the United States 1940-1947* (Annex VI of the *Proceedings*)—that the problem of corporate authorship never had been the object of serious study, after the *C. R.* were established, and that nobody has clearly worked out the "fundamental theory" of corporate authorship. Osborn, following

Hanson, shows, how in many individual cases the *C. R.* cause doubt and disorganization, drastically pointing out the difficulties which result from the frequently occurring changes of names of government agencies, institutions and societies. Osborn is certainly right in saying, "We are sure that the corporate entry is sound in theory, but we are not so sure when it comes to individual cases." The practical conclusion, drawn by the Americans from this situation, is that the *C. R.* needs a thorough revision in the treatment of corporate authorship. A revised text of the rules is planned and a preliminary draft was published in 1941. The decisive problems, however, were not touched upon, and, therefore, the draft was rejected by many. A final version of the new *C. R.* must be preceded by a "thorough investigation of the corporate entry." This opens a valuable and perhaps unique chance for countries which do not use the *C. R.* to make their influence felt in the final rules.

Not only in the United States, but also in other countries voices are heard, very different from the tired skepticism which prevailed in 1939 in the Hague, when the same committee discussed the topic of uniform cataloging. So in France a strong movement in favor of unification of catalogs led to the publication of a national code of cataloging in 1945, which is, however, rather vague as far as corporate entries are concerned (according to the statement of Mr. Ansteinsson). Still more receptive to international tendencies of unification are the librarians of Czechoslovakia. They realize that they are in the focal point of the struggle between the Pr. I. and the *C. R.*, the latter basically accepted by Russia. An anonymous reporter for Czechoslovakia, describing in the *C. I. B.* report of 1947 the library development of his country, calls the diversity of the Ger-

⁴ Actes du Comité international des bibliothèques, 14^{me} session, Londres 20-23 sept. 1948. La Haye, 1949.

⁵ Actes du Comité international des bibliothèques, 13^{me} session, Oslo 20-22 mai 1947. La Haye, 1947.

man and the American concept, historically represented by the influential personalities of Cutter and Dziatzko, the real core of the international unification problem. The Czechoslovakian report recognizes fully the thoroughness and logical consistency of the Pr. I., but emphasizes the usefulness of corporate authorship, especially taking into consideration the enormous increase of "anonymous" publications.

It is clear that a fundamental prerequisite for an international code of cataloging rules is national unification of cataloging practice. In many countries there is still

considerable inconsistency and diversity between the different types of libraries and sometimes between linguistic groups. But the progress in national codification may and should be accompanied by efforts to promote international unification. It is up to the International Federation of Library Associations to attack the main problems which are sketchily outlined in this article with energy and with the optimistic feeling that in spite of all obstacles the final target will be reached and will work out to the benefit of all.

Remodel While You Work

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and during operations in order to adjust the minds of the public and staff to the extraordinary conditions prevailing. In due time, preparations to reoccupy the refinished building should be made in some detail, to proceed by department or section, perhaps as construction work is completed. A celebration by staff, public and friends might well signalize the termination of the alterations work or of a particularly significant portion of it (such as a rare book room or an undergraduate library). It would mark the cessation of a particularly difficult and trying experience and might open a new era in library history.

It is difficult to anticipate the contingencies which may arise while revising and adding to existing construction. For this reason remodeling is less sought by building contractors than is new construction, and if

revisions are to be very comprehensive, unit costs may run higher than for new work. Extensive alterations during occupancy are disadvantageous both to contractor and librarians, and the most workable compromise should be made between normal library function and the complete abandonment of the building to plasterers, painters and plumbers.

Remodeling calls for careful, creative planning, adequate funding, meticulous coordination and limitless reserves of staff good will and endurance. But if the old building is to continue as a modern library, an educational force and research center, and as a workshop for an inspired library staff, it must be continuously reshaped in the image of that fleeting goal, ideal function, and of that evanescent measure of good and beauty, our hearts' desire.