RDA: Game on!

By Penny Swanson.

This session was convened by Linda Woodcock, and sponsored by BCCATs. It was very well attended with 29 registrants from all types of libraries.

Resource Description and Access, the new AACR is (finally) coming soon! Much discussed, sometimes maligned and long awaited, RDA is finally done, and LC and other large libraries are trying it out. This workshop outlined what has happened, what will change and what we will be looking forward to.

Susan Andrews, Principal Cataloguer at UBC, gave us the background. Why do we need a completely new set of rules? To support new formats, primarily digital, among other things. Under RDA libraries have 'resources', rather than 'materials', and the 'rules' are 'guidelines'. RDA is intrinsically linked with FRBR, which is a whole new way of looking at bibliographic description and the relationships between resources. We are still trying to address the fundamental user needs of finding, identifying, selecting and obtaining resources however. The FRBR terms 'work, manifestation, expression and items' are used in RDA. Only 4 sections deal with description, 6 deal with relationships. RDA also uses FRAD – Functional Requirements for Authority Data which will change the amount of information available in authority records (more not less!)

Linda Woodcock, Technical Services Librarian at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, spoke on the Principles of RDA, the primary differences from AACRII, how it will be tested and (maybe) implemented and what is happening around training in Canada. The goals for RDA were that it be extensible, flexible and interoperable. RDA is not just for libraries, but also for anyone that needs to describe any kind of resource (from web sites to inanimate objects in museums). The guidelines emphasize data that can be read by computers and can be stored in any system or communication format.

The principles guiding RDA are:
- differentiation,
- sufficiency,
- relationships,
- representation
- and common usage or practice.

Resource description should allow users to distinguish between resources, be sufficient to meet user needs, describe relationships between resources, represent the resource's representation of itself, and use common terms, language and script of the agency that created the data.

So what does all that mean? Among other things: no more abbreviations, unless the abbreviation is on the item itself. Transcribe information from the item exactly as stated on the item. No 'rule of 3', no interpretation of the data, no more Latin, instead write things out in plain language.

One of the big changes, that users may see is the loss of the gmd (that [videorecording] or other term in square brackets after the title). It is replaced by three elements: media type, carrier type and content type (two-dimensional moving image, video, videodisc). These and all RDA elements have been incorporated into MARC although metadata based on RDA need not be carried in MARC format.

Adam L. Schiff, Principal Cataloger at University of Washington Libraries, gave us concrete examples of what description and coding under RDA will look like. Inaccuracies in the title will no longer have cataloguer supplied '[sic]' to let users know that the inaccuracy is on the resource itself. Instead there will be a note about it. No more [et al.]. If there are more than 3 authors, list them all or list the first one and add '[and five others]' – a decision to be made by individual libraries. No abbreviations: Second edition, British Columbia – if that is the way it is in the resource being described. Also: pages, illustrations, etc.

In authority records (remember FRAD) there will be more information. 'Jr.,' will be included in personal name headings. There will no longer be uniform titles separated from the name heading that goes along with them (no more 240s in MARC records). Instead there will be an additional author/title heading. This will make it much easier for authority programs to deal with.

Linda also spoke about implementation and training plans. Library and Archives Canada have committed to adopt RDA, but will do internal testing before distributing records. In the US, LC and 28 other libraries will be testing RDA from June to March 2011, then will announce implementation plans. LC may begin distributing records as early as this October.

LAC and a committee are making plans for training across Canada. BCCATs may be sponsoring some training soon?

This was an excellent workshop (who would have thought cataloguing could be so spell-binding!) It left me looking forward to RDA, rather than fearing it, and feeling that I now have some grasp of the principles behind it and what it will mean for OPACs of the future.

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