



RDA pros and cons: one point of view from Brazil

Eliane Serrão Alves Mey, Isabel Arino Grau
Fernanda Salgado Biar

In the decades of the eighties and nineties of the past century, there was pressure to cut costs for cataloging, the explosion of electronic communication technologies (such as the Internet, leading to OPACs), the dissemination of new types of items (such as digital materials, and materials available online), and a desire to better attend to the demands of users, according to Mey (Mey and Silveira, p. 86).¹ The need to realign library practices in accordance with these factors led to revisions in the structures of bibliographic records, of concepts, practices, codes and formats, in addition to highlighting the relevance of strengthening cooperative cataloging and promoting the internationalization of standards of description. At the same time, studies such as the paper by Barbara Tillett regarding bibliographic relationships (“Bibliographic Relationships”), which analyzed these relationships in catalogs and cataloging codes, led to a reevaluation of conceptual structures which would serve as support for the evolution of cataloging systems. Articles like those by Michael Heaney (“Object-oriented cataloging”) and Rebecca Green (“The design of

¹This paper represents just one point of view from one study group, and does not represent a unanimity about the RDA in Brazil, since we have many different visions on this theme.



a relational database for large-scale bibliographic retrieval”) raised questions such as the volatile character of electronic publications, object-oriented cataloging, and relational databases for bibliographic recovery. The International Conference on the Principles and Future Development of AACR (Toronto, 1997) already showed a desire to «document the basic principles that underlie the rules and explorations into content versus carrier» (*Resource description & access*) and the need for changes in AACR. According to Rodríguez García (“Elementos para reflexionar sobre el nuevo estándar para la descripción y acceso a recursos”), cataloging rules for the American AACR model needed drastic change, since they were unable to represent new information resources. As the Toronto Conference noted in 1997, «rules were slowly adjusted to new types of resources, and were not logically coherent»(Rodríguez García). In the nineties, IFLA put together a study group on Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), developing a conceptual model for entity-relationship. This is «a generalized view of the bibliographic universe and is intended to be independent of any cataloging code or implementation»(Tillett, *The FRBR Model*), helping to «clarify concepts and terms that we have used in the past and to help us explore news ways to fulfill the objectives of catalogs»(*The FRBR Model*). Catalogs should allow the user to find what s/he needs, through the use of «user tasks»: to find, to identify and to select a bibliographic resource, to obtain an item, and «to navigate within a catalogue and beyond», as explained in the *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* (of Library Associations and Institutions, p.3-4). The Statement «builds on the great cataloguing traditions of the world, and also on the conceptual model in the IFLA Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR)»(, p. 1), including as it relates to user tasks. It modernized and broadened the Statement of Principles of 1961 («Paris Principles»), addressing not only works of text, but

all the types of materials and all the aspects of bibliographical data and authority used in library catalogs (Tillett, "Cataloging Principles: IME ICC"). The «Paris Principles», approved by the International Conference on Cataloging Principles in 1961, were intended to serve as the basis for an «international and uniform understanding regarding cataloging principles»(Mey and Silveira, p. 90) and influenced a large portion of later codes. We would like to emphasize the function «navigate in a catalog, and beyond it»by means of bibliographic relationships, present in the Statement of 2009, which opens broad perspectives regarding the functions of a catalog, not limited to finding, identifying and selecting a bibliographic resource. Definition of these new international cataloging principles to replace the «Paris Principles»took place within a plan "to promote the development of an international cataloguing code for bibliographic description and access".² The task was charged to five meetings arranged by IFLA on various continents, between 2003 and 2007, the International Meetings of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code (IME ICC). In addition to working on the new Statement, the objective was «to increase the ability to share cataloguing information worldwide by promoting standards for the content of bibliographic and authority records used in library catalogues». Among other topics, the IME ICC revised the Statement that had been worked on at prior meetings, examined local cataloging codes, compared these and the «Paris Principles», checked whether rule and cataloging practices could be more similar, and made suggestions for the new international cataloging code. The proceedings and the Statement were published in various languages. The five IME ICC raised many expectations world-wide concerning this new international cataloging code. Among other elements, that it would be free, as the

²IME-ICC: IFLA Meetings of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code. 2012. URL <http://www.ifla.org/node/576>.

International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD); that it could merge different points of view regarding cataloging questions; that it would deal with the questions raised during the Meetings; that it would be a basis for and encourage the use of the FRBR family, and would not only be an AACR2 with new nomenclature; that it would work with entity-relationship databases, and not with a hierarchical format. For Tillett (Tillett, "RDA (Resource Description and Access): Status Report on the New Cataloguing Code = Informe sobre el nuevo código de catalogación"), a new and necessary cataloging code should be consistent with respect to the most diverse and complex types of contents and materials, should show the points in common for various differing types of resources, and return to an approach more directed by principles. Although written in a strange language as Portuguese, since 1987 Mey has identified as characteristics necessary for cataloging: integrity, clarity, precision, logic and consistency (Mey). That is, truth in what is recorded, clarity for our user, precision in identification of the element, logic of organization of the cataloging products, as the catalogs or the cataloged items, consistency in the use of norms. This author affirms that cataloging is a communication process, where the bibliographic representation individualizes each resource through its differences and unifies the bibliographic resources through their similarities: that is the cataloging's aim. It is more important to the user not only to find and have access to what she/he is looking for, but to be motivated and discover the unknown. As stated by Ranganathan, the resource and its creator are also looking for their user. The Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (formerly Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR) had decided that this code would be a new version of AACR, or AACR3. However, during a meeting in 2005, the choice was made for another approach, with a view to a very different scenario from what had been planned

on until that point. From «AACR3: Resource Description and Access», the proposal came to be called «Resource Description and Access»(RDA). Among other characteristics, it was supposed to be in line with the models of FRBR and FRAR (Functional Requirements for Authority Records).³ Thus, as said above, the RDA (Canadian Library Association, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (Great Britain), and Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA) is proposed to be this international cataloging code. Undoubtedly, it brings many positive points. At the same time, RDA can be analyzed from other points of view, such as: a) it is not as close to FRBR as expected, since it retains a more descriptive approach, rather than a relationship model approach ; b) it is not as far from AACR2 as expected, through keeping rules and examples to catalog manifestations, instead of a multiple level approach; c) as a consequence, it does not use all the possibilities offered by new computer technologies; d) with regard to translation: in Brazil, the translation of AACR2 was restricted to the original text, not including solutions and examples used in our country and with our language (it was expected that RDA would respect these issues); e) and last, but not least, the price of RDA. In our opinion, the most critical aspect of RDA has to do with its distancing from the FRBR family. FRBR (IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records et al.) meant a considerable advance with respect to theoretical aspects of cataloging, given that they obliged us to rethink what we were doing, why we were doing it, and most importantly, for whom we were doing it. At the same time, FRBR allowed us to work with entity-relationship computing systems, with relations being the principal focus of catalogs. Were it not for the relationships established, the catalogs would become mere lists. It is

³Historic documents: Outcomes of the Meeting of the Joint Steering Committee Held in Chicago, U.S.A, 24-28 April 2005. 2009. URL <http://www.rda-jsc.org/0504out.html>.

worth remembering that, originally, the Greek word «catalog» had a meaning similar to the Latin word «classification». However, FRBR considerably developed the first group of entities, the raw material regarding which we produce our bibliographic records. To the second group of entities another was added, and complementarity was sought through FRAD. For various reasons, since the outset, the third group, relating to subject, presented problems regarding which we would like to make some observations, although FRSAD have resolved the issue. When we express the entities of the first group in simple terms, we can verify that:

1. the entity work is distinguished by its name (title) and respective author, when the latter exists. Thus, the first area of the ISBD, or rather, the access points for uniform title (original title) and author, would be sufficient for identifying a work. Since the original title is not always comprehensible to our user, we should add the conventional title, or the proper title presented in the expression or in the manifestation that is presented for cataloging. Thus, the work can be fully identified and related to others through access points;
2. the entity expression is identified through areas 1, 2 of the ISBD, that is, through title, responsibilities and edition. Area 3 remains an unknown, in the sense of sometimes being linked to expression and sometimes to work, as noted by Françoise Leresche and Françoise Bourdon (Leresche and Bourdon). It falls to us to decide whether responsibilities will be in area 1, or in notes, in area 7. In automated systems, there is no reason to put them in notes, when all types of responsibilities can be in specific fields or subfields, including searchable fields, and can generate their own access points. The entity expression should be the basis of the bibliographic record, to which fields are added relating to: different manifestations and location

of the item. To synthesize, the work will allow for its full identification, including with respect to the subject, and the expression will allow for selection among the various possibilities of manifestation. A unique bibliographic record will link all the manifestations of the same expression, of the same work. This, in our opinion, is the basic principle of FRBR;

3. the entity manifestation, secondary in all respects, is identified by areas 4, 5, 6 and 8 of the ISBD. Due to the character as bibliographic representation of the manifestation, stemming from library practices of the last fifty or sixty years (not from Cutter, who linked theory and practice), chapter 2 of RDA deals directly with manifestation, thus distancing itself from the principles of FRBR, in spite of various assertions to the contrary. We obtain, through this centrality of manifestation, strange results, such as Brazilian theses and dissertations, required to be simultaneously presented in paper (thus, manuscript, since unpublished) and electronic (thus, published) formats, which generate two different manifestations and two different bibliographic records! If we were to consider the work or the expression, and not the manifestation, we would have a single record, with two indications of manifestation. The same could be said of vinyl records that become CDs, films that become DVDs, and so forth;
4. with respect to the entity item, this has to do only with each individual library or documentation center. Specific fields, such as call number or note, in automated system, individualize the items, with no problems.

Notes, area 7 of the ISBD, are divided into four types:

1. those that are absolutely useless, such as: notes for bibliography and index, notes regarding biographical data for the

- author (not a biography of respectable length), among others;
2. those relative to the identification of the work or the expression, which are important, such as certain indications of titles or responsibilities, that ought to have their own place along with the others, and become searchable;
 3. those referring to content, whether whole/part (works in collections, for example, or tracks on recordings), or identification of content itself (nature of the work, for example);
 4. those which relate works, which are fundamental, the very spirit of the catalogue; for example, a sequence of works based on other prior works. For us, the most significant example is *The beggar's opera*, work based on English, Scottish and Irish folk songs, by Johann Christoph Pepusch, with libretto by John Gay (1724); this in turn was the source of the arrangement by Kurt Weill, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, with text by Berthold Friedrich Brecht (1928); which in turn influenced the adaptation by Chico Buarque (1978), *A ópera do malandro*. Such information about the history of a work can stimulate the user, leading her/him to new discoveries. We need to think of the catalog as a means, as well, as said above, of discovering what is not known. Relationships can be evident or hidden, because today's computational resources allow for an à la carte layout for the user. There is one entry, but multiple possible exits – even the cover of the book, or record, or film, or whatever is most appropriate for the resource.

With respect to FRAD, which are essentially pragmatic, they generated various chapters of RDA and the database for name-authorities for MARC, moving somewhat away from FRBR, to the degree in which they created entities that might more properly be attributes.

However, here is not the place or time to deal with this polemical question. FRISAD (Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data), the most conceptual model of the FRBR family, presents in an irreproachable form the various visions of a subject, entities and attributes. They rightly abandon the subjects in FRBR. There was a lacuna in that third group of entities. On the other hand, it would become impossible to conciliate the various methods and instruments used, throughout the world, to identify the subjects of a work. Further, no matter how tight the control of vocabulary, one must consider the human factor in indexing. The indexers differ with respect to education, culture, beliefs, languages, as well as diverse users being addressed. Clarinda Lucas (*Leitura e interpretação em Biblioteconomia*) carried out a well-supported analysis of the same work indexed by different libraries, finding differing focuses. Thus, in spite of the best intentions of RDA in dealing with subjects – a considerable advance for catalogers – the issue is not always tranquil and pragmatic. The FRBR family was already the object of many analyses and of two different numbers of the *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, at different times, including by various respected Italian authors. We do not, absolutely, want to «teach the Pope to say the Mass», as the Brazilian expression goes. The best analysis of RDA came to us from France, which created a study group for this topic, with the results summarized by Françoise Leresche and Françoise Bourdon, from which we have taken some key points, with which we agree: “RDA remains in fact very faithful to the AACR” ; “ISO standards are almost totally ignored [...] and one may note, too, a lack of reference to IFLA documents, such as Names of persons [...]” – a problem which we particularly note with respect to names in Portuguese. “One may also affirm that RDA proposes ONE particular interpretation of the FRBR model” (, p. 2). Finally, one important conclusion: “The report of the US RDA Test Coor-

dinating Committee confirms that there is some consensus on the questions raised by RDA today: lack of internationalisation, poor treatment of audiovisual resources and special materials, etc.”(, p.). In our opinion, the principal lacuna is the question of internationalization, which appears, for example, in the removal of familiar Latin abbreviations, causing ambiguity in records, at least for those of us using a Romance language. The European study group on RDA, EURIG, is preparing a series of proposals for inclusions or changes, analysed by the institutions responsible for RDA. In turn, in 2009, the new Italian cataloging code was published (which we did not have access to). Will in fact RDA be the long-awaited international cataloging code? If so, we need to think about the very serious problems of translation and costs. With respect to the translation of AACR2, there was no permission for inclusion in the text of Brazilian decisions, whether in reference to description, or in reference to headings for personal names, places and collective entities, always placed in appendices, footnotes, or external documents. Due to cost, the entire translation was based on volunteer labor. RDA has an even higher cost, including royalties. How to solve this problem on an international basis? From the very individual point of view of our study groups – we once more emphasize that we do not represent a unanimous Brazilian opinion – we believe that only an adaptation would be able to shape our needs and our multiculturalism to a new cataloging code. In spite of its unquestionable value, in our opinion we cannot yet accept this new Anglo-American code as resolved and completed. RDA remains an open question. On the other hand, Françoise Leresche and Françoise Bourdon also stated: “Today RDA presents the most accomplished version of this approach [to FRBR] and it is what makes it valuable”. Certainly, one must respect the tireless and monumental work done by the Anglo-Saxon team in producing RDA. One must respect the attempt to bring it in line

with the FRBR family. One must respect certain real advances that RDA represents, such as the end of the main entry, and the greater coverage for electronic documents. One must respect, finally, the group of scholars/catalogers who created RDA. Due to this enormous effort, we are here discussing it today. In the words of Barbara Tillett, we can say that this is a wonderful time to be a cataloger.

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ELIANE SERRÃO ALVES MEY, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

mey.eliane62@gmail.com

ISABEL ARINO GRAU, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

isagrau@unirio.br

FERNANDA SALGADO BIAR, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

nanda.biar@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: This paper intend to analyze the Resource Description and Access (RDA) code's pros and cons, from the point of view of some Brazilian catalogers. The RDA is proposed as an international cataloging code. Undoubtedly, it brings innovations and various positive points, including the introduction of digital materials and some elements from the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Description (FRBR) family. At the same time, RDA can be analyzed from other points of view, e.g., the problem of a strict translation and the prices for licencing or copyright.

KEYWORDS: Brazil, Cataloguing, RDA.

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