Library Cataloguing: Relevance to Modern Library Users

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Cataloguing is a popular library activity in which we often immerse much of our professional expertise. Cataloguing, therefore, in this regard is an expensive venture in terms of the human, material, and intellectual resource inputs that go into creating library catalogues. The action of cataloguing *per se* is defined as:

> To compile a list of documents according to a set of rules so as to enable the consulter to know what items are available, and from the class number, call number, or other means of identification, where they may be found[1].

We have taken this definition seriously in our day-to-day practical cataloguing, where we seem to put a lot of effort and emphasis into the function and purpose of library catalogues at the expense of relevance, use and ultimate user objectives. Library cataloguing has tended, therefore, to be independent of the user's needs, where provision for a co-ordinated bibliographic and information need has been ignored.

The arguments posited in this article are based on practical experience and observations in large library situations, including findings of empirical research studies done in advanced libraries elsewhere. Initially, the rationale behind this discussion originated from the view that the majority of library users:

- rarely use the catalogue;
- do not know how to use the catalogue;
- use the catalogue only as a last resort.

The majority of catalogue users are:

- mostly concerned with acquiring basic information, such as title, subject or class number and bother less with other bibliographic details;
- known-item searchers.

Some of the library users think they:

- can do without the catalogue[2].

Observations which have been made since the advent of the use of computers in libraries for information handling seem to suggest that:

- traditional original cataloguing, especially of basic textbooks, is on the decline;

- subject access seems to be the preferred and popular mode of information access;
- research and study of library catalogues has declined but there has been an increase in information retrieval;
- library cataloguing is changing fast, whereby the user interface in information access is also becoming an important cataloguing issue.

Liberalization of Cataloguing

As a result of the rather disappointing situation, the current poor response to catalogue use and non-use by library users, the inevitable question follows: Why then do we bother at all with library cataloguing or catalogues? What went wrong with library cataloguing? After all, since the 1930s cataloguing has epitomized the core fabric of the library profession, for in it lie the principles of organization of knowledge. The application of standards for cataloguing seems to have played a major role in the change of direction. Cataloguing is no longer an in-house activity. With the adoption of standards by many libraries in most countries, resource sharing has become a reality. Libraries in developed countries, with the adoption of these cataloguing standards, for example, have since developed cataloguing co-operatives and commercial ventures such as the provision of cataloguing in publication (CIP) data for printed library materials.

The objective of these new developments, apparently, is to reduce cataloguing costs, be they manpower or otherwise; achieve quality work, and utilize the time which should have been spent on original cataloguing on doing other library duties. The need for finding cheaper, convenient, and better methods of cataloguing arose from the recognition of the fact that cataloguing is an art, best suited to a few people with the tolerance to persevere with the "dreadful routines" of original cataloguing. Increasingly, as developments in the area of information retrieval became popular, which emphasized certain keyword access points, questions were asked on the necessity and viability of including all the bibliographic details of a document on the catalogue record. Doubts were raised as to whether library users really needed all this information being made available on the catalogue record. As cataloguing continued to be liberalized, in that libraries saw the benefits of pooling their cataloguing efforts, fewer cataloguers were required in those co-operating libraries to do original cataloguing. Other library professionals began to move into other new and interesting areas of expertise.

While steps towards the liberalization of cataloguing hastened, the need for more cataloguers, and hence cataloguing activity, in libraries regrettably declined. At present, more often than not, cataloguing backlogs in libraries are created from materials without CIP entries, which is a factual indication that original cataloguing is gradually becoming a rarity, a cataloguing nuisance, and a chore

changed or is no longer necessary. The way it is being done by expert cataloguers, with the aid of information technology, to meet sophisticated information needs of library clientele, gives the false impression that cataloguing is unnecessary. Cataloguing techniques are still the same, but it is the traditional emphasis that has changed in favour of conceptual cataloguing.

Cataloguing Research

Research in library cataloguing, especially in library schools, has lost popularity with many students and lecturers, who mistakenly think very little of cataloguing other than as an old-fashioned routine. Whereas it is a fact that cataloguing is no longer interesting to many people, its value has not waned in the least. Rather it should be thought of and seen in the light of new developments in information retrieval. Whether or not it offers as many challenges as computing and on-line searching is a different matter altogether. Instead, it should be realized that the real art of cataloguing is still the same — only it is appearing in a different form and under new terminologies such as on-line public access catalogues (OPACs), abstracting and indexing, thesaurus construction, MARC, public enquiry, databases, subject cataloguing, etc.

Moreover, a lot of cataloguing principles are being researched under subsumed names of related subject disciplines such as epistemology; theory of knowledge; user studies; information transfer and database creation. It should then, perhaps, be appreciated that cataloguing has yielded several new branches of information organization and retrieval systems that are new to many people and therefore pass unnoticed under different terminologies.

Computerized Cataloguing

The use of computers for information processing has transformed cataloguing activity as is seen in the way storage and retrieval of information is being handled. Data manipulation in an on-line environment has enhanced the quality and quantity of information searches and retrieval by enquirers. The application of this modern technology in the library information environment has resulted in the development of several OPACs, CD-ROMs, live on-line databases such as DIALOG, BLAISE, etc., and other in-house custom-developed bibliographic databases.

Research which has so far been done in the area of computerized cataloguing, has gradually shifted emphasis towards production of more advanced studies on on-line subject access catalogues. This new trend of development signifies the emergence of a different approach; it acknowledges changed behaviour in the information needs of modern library users. Manual card catalogues which are non-manipulative, only help to answer known author or title or subject item searches, but offer limited browsing capability which is a crucial recipe for library researchers[3].

are stored and retrieved in a flexible and manipulative manner. This design mimics the human brain function especially in the act of thinking, where thought interactions are never linear but random. The user has the choice of inputs, searches and format for displaying output. This rapid improvement in information access using author, title and subject keywords, has brought new demands on the modern cataloguer. These demands include possession of certain personal academic and intellectual qualities, prerequisites often not required for ordinary cataloguers.

The MARC format appears to have overshadowed the AACR2/ISBD format. Data created using the MARC format are now increasingly becoming a mode for data transfer for use elsewhere, providing the computer system with the facilities for downloading and/or uploading MARC records. Whether the impact and widespread use of MARC will have an adverse effect on the use of AACR2 is a matter which time alone will tell, but the signs are there that AACR3 may never come (AACR2 1990 ed. is now being referred to as AACR2.5). The imminent changes brought about by the use of computers in information processing are a direct challenge to library cataloguing. Conceptual cataloguing is already under way and is increasingly being popularized. However, it should be appreciated that the change has arisen out of the need to satisfy our users' information needs, whether AACR2 or MARC is in control. The change is inevitable and necessary, owing to the demands of today's dynamic and sophisticated library users.

Subject Access

Subject access has been given prominence in research on OPACs, arising from the significant role of subject access in information retrieval. Milstead defines subject access in an information retrieval system by stating that:

> A subject access system may be called an index, a catalogue, a database, or even simply a guide; the essential characteristic is that it provides access to items, usually documents or parts of documents, by their subject(s). The items may be books, articles, chapters, paragraphs, illustrations, graphs or even specific facts within the documents. This access is provided in such a manner as to avoid the necessity of scanning the entire file to reach the desired information[4].

The research already available provides enough evidence that the majority of library users perform subject searchers[3]. Coates adds that:

> There should be little need to lay emphasis on the key role of subject cataloguing in libraries... The vast increase in the number of documents in every sphere of human activity, the increased complexity of the pattern of knowledge, and the accelerating development of a new knowledge necessitate a foolproof method of access to records on any subject that may be required[5].

The first generation OPACs did not give better treatment to subject access, hence they have been criticized for being "library like". Redesign of these OPACs resulted in the development of modern second generation OPACs which were a hybrid between the traditional library catalogues and ideas obtained from on-

On the whole, it has been established that subject access is of crucial importance to information retrieval, attested by advanced research on second and third generation OPACs, by commercial databases, and CD-ROM products such as LCSH CDMARC of the Library of Congress. There are also many other software packages — for example, free text, intelligent front end, expert system, and hypertext — being released for developing information retrieval systems for free-text and natural language subject indexing and access.

These software systems have been developed in recognition and appreciation of the complex human mental processes that occur during the act of information retrieval. Information needs exist in an anomalous state in the mind of the enquirer, and can be expressed better by the individual (though not easily explained), rather than through an intermediary. OPACs offer enquirers a better opportunity to conduct their own search strategy to satisfy their own specific information needs problems. In his summary, Hancock adds that:

> The analysis of expressed topics, search formulation strategy and documents retrieved reveal the adaptive nature of the subject searching process, whereby the user adapts to the structure of the available tools. The information retrieval task in a traditional library system is tailored by the system to a single, one dimensional, sequential process. It is suggested that a major obstacle to subject searching effectiveness may lie in the lack of interaction between the different possible approaches in the searching process; the indexing language, the classification and the titles. It is to be hoped that a future online searching environment will encourage a more truly interactive approach to subject searching[6].

Conclusion

Problems encountered by library users in catalogue use or non-use need to be addressed with a view to improving information retrieval by reconsidering present cataloguing principles, policies, and practices. There is urgent need to review and redesign library cataloguing to create better information retrieval systems relevant to the present generation of library users. Cataloguing should move away from the bibliographic record details accuracy obsession, and focus more on the mind of the user (conceptual cataloguing) where information is synthesized. The new system design should consider how the human mind functions. Najarian attests that:

> The experimental findings suggests several considerations for the designs of library systems of organization and access that would take into account characteristics of the conceptual organization of knowledge. Such systems are likely to be particularly effective in aiding the user in his search for information since they would: (1) employ organizational schemes that are familiar to the individual; (2) permit a strategy for the exploration of a subject area similar to the type of search procedure which seems to facilitate the retrieval of items from memory; and (3) take into consideration the apparent limits on the amount of information that the individual can successfully attend to at one time[7].

Several studies have been conducted on the library user search process, which confirm the fact that the cognitive and affective aspects of the process of

The use of computers for library cataloguing is a vital development strategy to consider, and is recommended for those libraries which have not yet done so already. This is in appreciation of the advantages offered by the computer in information processing. Further research and possible implementation of system design of user interfaces on OPACs should be continued vigorously[9].

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A New Home for Post Office History

The British Post Office gave the idea of a cheap, uniform postal system to the world, and the new Post Office Archives and Records Centre is a treasure house of history. The range of documents provides a major resource for both professional historians and amateurs interested in subjects ranging from local and family histories, philately, transport history, and the development of particular Post Office services. They show how the Post Office has touched the lives of millions of British people, including a record of the moment at which an idea was put forward which revolutionalized world communications.

That document is the minutes of a meeting in 1837 at which Rowland Hill unveiled his idea for an adhesive stamp — a breakthrough which spread round the globe and founded a worldwide postal service open to ordinary people rather than just the rich.

The Post Office has also kept remarkably good appointment records right back to 1831. Post Office employees have included Anthony Trollope and Dr Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia as "Deputy Postmaster and Manager of all His Majesty's Provinces and Dominions on the Continent of North America". There are also records from 1774 of Franklin's dismissal.

Other Post Office "employees" have included the many official Post Office cats who have served in the Post Office Cat Force since it was first introduced in 1868, and the records include their changing wage rates and maternity allowances.

The appointment records dating from 1831 make the Centre particularly interesting to genealogists, and family historians can also use the pension records, which can provide dates of service for employees, salary lists, establishment books and the records of financial matters which are virtually complete right back to 1686. Through these it is sometimes possible to trace individuals at particular offices, and even the occupations that postmasters combined with their Post Office work, right back to the 1670s.

The Centre is also a major resource for social historians, and many of the records throw considerable light on the social and economic development of Britain.

Among the files is one that records how in 1909 two members of the National Women's Social and Political Union (Suffragettes) posted two of their colleagues by Express Letter Delivery Service to Mr Asquith, the Prime Minister. The Post Office messenger escorted the ladies to 10 Downing Street, but Mr Asquith's butler refused to accept the "letters", declaring: "You are dead letters