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Has the User Been Ignored?

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## The Pragmatic Basis of Catalog Codes: Has the User Been Ignored?

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**ABSTRACT.** This article discusses the major catalog codes published in the United States and Great Britain since 1841. The main point made is that, although a number of the authors of these code had the catalog user in mind when creating their codes, not one of the codes was significantly influenced by the findings of empirical investigations of user needs. The article concludes with the idea that authors of future codes should consider taking into account the research findings of catalog use studies when creating their codes.

The Convenience of the User Should Be Preferred to the Ease of the Cataloguer

— *Charles A. Cutter*

Individual librarians or committees composed mainly of librarians have originated American and British library catalog codes those compilations of rules which stipulate what information is to be included in the bibliographic records found in a library's catalog of holdings. These persons have decided what rules to include in their codes, and consequently have made crucial decisions which directly affected all catalog user groups. The approach of the creators of codes to their work was usually pragmatic. Decisions regarding the content of a code were based on experience mainly derived from personal observation, expertise, consultation with colleagues intuition, and occasionally theory. The main goals of these individuals and committees were to enhance access to library holdings and to standardize cataloging practices.

Though most of these creators of codes had the convenience of library patrons in mind when they wrote their codes — some indicating in the introduction to their codes to what extent patrons needs affected their rules, they generally did not do studies incorporating empirical methods to investigate patrons requirements, those needs which make it necessary for them to consult catalogs in the first place, and the ways patrons actually consult catalogs in attempting to find answers which fulfill their needs, that is, their catalog-searching behavior. One reason for this was that empirical methods for the systematic study of user needs and behavior were nonexistent throughout much of the period of time during which codes have been compiled. Though survey methods applicable to catalog use have been available for a number of decades now and independent empirical studies of use by library patrons of catalogs of all types have been done, these methods and their application have not significantly influenced the structure or content of any code.<sup>1</sup> Patrons therefore never played an easily perceived role in the formulation of catalog codes. Whether catalog use should play a role in the development of cataloging theory and practice is an issue the library profession has historically ignored.

Sir Anthony Panizzi, the man most associated with the beginnings of modern cataloging, espoused the idea of having librarians responsible for determining catalog code rules for access and description. As Keeper of the Department of Printed Books at the British Museum from 1837 to 1856 (and then chief librarian from

1856 to 1867), Panizzi took on the responsibility of directing the work of compiling and printing a new edition of the *Catalogue of Printed Books* for the Department in the first year of his tenure. Early in the project Panizzi asked for and was given permission to draw up cataloging rules whose intent was to standardize the format of the bibliographic records and to assure that enough detail was included to differentiate one record from another. Though he exercised overall responsibility for this endeavor, a staff committee composed of the librarians J. Winter Jones, Thomas Watts, Edward Edwards, and John Perry assisted him.<sup>2</sup> When completed the rules were presented to a committee of Trustees which discussed, amended, and then approved them on July 13, 1839.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Department's catalogers used the code to catalog works to be included in the *Catalogue of Printed Books*.

However, the painstaking work which Panizzi exacted from his catalogers slowed the pace of the project. Finally ten years had elapsed and no printed catalog was yet available. This situation produced outcries from the public, and the House of Commons, which was responsible for the Museum since it was a national institution, was obliged to act. The government appointed commissioners in 1847 to examine the Museum's affairs, in particular the causes for the delays in printing the catalog. Selected members of the Museum's public, its Board of Trustees, and its staff testified. Most of the witnesses opposed in some way or another Panizzi's plan for the catalog. When he was called before the commission to explain why the work was taking so long, disagreement began to emerge over the degree of bibliographic description necessary for the catalog records. Many blamed the delays on the overly elaborate description.<sup>4</sup> When called before the commission, Thomas Carlyle, one of the distinguished users of the Museum, testified:

Elaborate catalogues are not what we require; but legible catalogues, accessible to everybody. The grand use of any catalogue is to tell you, in any intelligible way, that such and such books are in the library . . . I should expect it to be a simple thing enough to draw up a list of the names of the books, which would be a great help to the student.<sup>5</sup>

Panizzi's defense of his policies has served as a guiding principle for cataloging ever since. In the end, the committee decided to support his point of view, which he succinctly outlined in testimony given the commissioners:

The larger the library is, the more you must distinguish the books from each other, and consequently the more fully and more accurately you must catalogue them. . . . When I come to a great and national library, where I have the editions or works of "Abelard," I have a right to find those editions and works so well distinguished from each other that I may get exactly the particular one which I want.<sup>6</sup>

One can assume Panizzi was speaking for all catalog users.

In short, throughout the inquiry disagreement centered around how professional librarians—or at least the one librarian responsible for policy-thought cataloging should be done as opposed to how the lay public, including members of the Board of Trustees and the Parliamentary commission, thought it should be done. And, of course, only those members of the public fortunate enough to have expressed their opinions in front of the commission, some of whose members were peers of the realm, had the opportunity to influence cataloging policy.

The Parliamentary commission of 1847 left an important legacy to the library profession. When the commissioners backed the rules formulated by Panizzi and his library committee in 1839 and published as the *Rules for Compiling the Catalogue of Printed Books, Maps, and Music in the British Museum* (the "91 Rules") in 1841, a precedent was set. From that time, individual librarians or committees composed mainly of librarians would create cataloging codes and decide what information would be included in the bibliographic record.

Individual librarians were responsible for the authorship of other codes published before 1876. For example, Andrea Crestadoro, an acquaintance of Panizzi at the British Museum who was exasperated by the delays in the printing of the *Catalogue of Printed Books*, wrote in 1856 an essay titled "The Art of Making Catalogues of Libraries" which served as the basis for a code. In it he advocated the idea of the "inventorial" catalog which would have detailed entries arranged in order of accession. The library patron was to be provided access to the entries through an alphabetical index of names and subjects.<sup>7</sup> The Public Library of Manchester, England adopted this approach for its catalog and hired Crestadoro to implement it there in 1864.<sup>8</sup> Like Panizzi, Crestadoro intended to have his catalog serve the needs of catalog users, but the rules of his code were not based on an empirical investigation of those needs.

In 1852, the American Charles C. Jewett, librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, submitted a plan for a general catalog of public libraries in the United States to Joseph Henry, Secretary of the Institution. His intention was to secure general uniformity of bibliographic records through a system of "stereotyping" each title. This plan would have made it possible for libraries to print annual editions of their catalogs, incorporating the titles acquire' during the previous year in each new edition, and for the Smithsonian to print a general union catalog which would have include' both its own holdings and those of all the public libraries. The uniformity Jewett sought was to be achieved not just through stereotyping but also through use of a single set of general cataloging rule which would be used by all the libraries. In the same year Jewel published a report titled *On the Construction of Catalogues of Libraries* which, among other things, set forth the first American cataloging rules for establishing headings for author entries. The report contained thirty-nine rules which were based on those of Panizzi. In fact Jewett acknowledged outright that he used some of Panizzi's rules verbatim.<sup>9</sup> And Jewett's stated goal of serving the needs of users also reflected Panizzi s ideas. Though his project never came to final fruition, years later his goal of compiling a union catalog was met in the United States when the National Union Catalog began publication in 1953 and in Germany as early as 1899 when the Prussian Instructions was compiled under Jewett's influence.<sup>10</sup>

Charles A. Cutter's *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue*, first published in 1876, was the last published code written by one person." The concepts and principles expressed in his code were based on years of experience Cutter acquired while librarian at the Boston Athenaeum, although Jewett's work was also a major influence in their formation. Cutter first applied his rules at the Boston Athenaeum and as the code's pragmatic approach was appreciated by other librarians, it began to be used at a number of libraries throughout the country. In his prefatory note, Cutter claimed to be the first investigator of the "first principles of cataloguing" and the first to "set forth the rules in a systematic way." One of the principles he expostulated was that "the convenience of the user should be preferred to the ease of the cataloguer." Cutter urged catalogers to do such things as select the customary use of the names of subjects and the best known form of the author s name so that this goal might be fulfilled.<sup>12</sup> The code's introduction lists objectives and means to bring about this convenience. These objectives and means have been studied for years by students of cataloging code history. Exactly how the "convenience of the user" would be determined Cutter did not specify; he himself, it would seem, relied upon his own experience rather than any systematic study of user needs or behavior. No one else did such a study during these years either: such things as survey research and transaction log analysis were twentieth century phenomena.

After 1876 committees representing library associations, private corporations, and large libraries replaced individuals as the authors of codes.<sup>13</sup> The American Library Association's 1878 publication *Condensed Rules for Cataloging* and its 1886 revised edition *Condensed Rules for Author and Title*, though written in the spirit of Cutter, Jewett, and Panizzi, were the creations of the A.L.A. Catalog Rules Revision Committee. The same direction was followed in Great Britain where Library Association committees were responsible for both the 1881 and 1883 editions of *Cataloguing Rules of the Library Association of the United Kingdom*. And joint revision committees wrote the 1908 code "Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries," an Anglo-American venture which both library pioneer Melvil Dewey and L. Stanley Jast, Honorary Secretary of the Library Association of Great Britain and well-known public librarian, promoted in its initial phase.<sup>14</sup>

Subsequent codes became more elaborate as libraries grew larger and catalogers, following in Panizzi's footsteps, insisted on cataloging materials fully and accurately in order to distinguish one item from another. These codes, however, were basically similar. And any criticism the codes spawned was not in response to the fact that the needs of catalog users had not contributed to their creation but rather that the rules were too elaborate. In 1936 the American Library Association Catalog Code Revision Committee began work on a new code whose preliminary edition, titled *A.L.A. Catalog Rules: Author and Title Entries*, was published in 1941. Vehement and widespread criticism of this code's overly elaborate, highly technical character was sparked by Andrew Osborn's "The Crisis in Cataloging," an article in an issue of *Library Quarterly* for that year.<sup>15</sup> The criticism dissuaded the American Library Association from putting the code into effect. Instead the committee continued working on it for a number of years, until finally in 1949 the first part, dealing only with the rules for entry and heading, was published as *A.L.A. Catalog Rules for Author and Title Entries*. Though many had hoped the committee would answer much of the criticism of the preliminary edition of 1941 with general revisions, the 1949 code instead kept much of what was in the preliminary edition. Catalogers began using it that year along with the Library of Congress's *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress*, which was also published in 1949 and became part two of *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*.

The *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging* was created by a committee of professional librarians drawn from staff members of the Library of Congress's Descriptive Cataloging Division.<sup>16</sup> It was the result of an intense effort on the part of the Library of Congress to express "the general opinion of American libraries" on what rules should be included in a code and how they should be formulated. The cumulated experience of many librarians, gathered from discussions, conferences, and mailed questionnaires whose purpose was to determine what rules these librarians thought should be included in the code and how they should be worded, went into the making of the Rules. Possibly for this reason it met with general approval.<sup>17</sup>

However, dissatisfaction with part one of the 1949 Code, *A.L.A. Catalog Rules for Author and Title Entries*, was intense. Shortly the American Library Association found itself in the position in which it could no longer put off change; action was necessary. In 1951 it invited Seymour Lubetsky, a consultant from the Library of Congress, to prepare a critical study of then current cataloging practices. This study did not entail a catalog use survey. Its findings were reported in *Cataloging Rules and Principles: A Critique of the A.L.A. Rules*, published in 1953. Briefly stated, Lubetsky expressed a need for a less complex code with more generalized rules based on well-defined principles. He felt such a code would better serve the needs of both library patrons and staff.<sup>18</sup>

Later in 1960 Lubetsky wrote his *Code of Cataloging Rules: Author and Title Entry*. It offered a radically new approach to cataloging. Essentially it was a broad draft of an outline code. So enthusiastic was the reception given to Lubetsky's draft code that, at a meeting in Paris in 1961, it served as the basis for a draft statement of international cataloging principles formulated by the International Conference on Cataloging Principles.<sup>19</sup> Soon afterwards, the American Library Association and the Library Association of Great Britain set up revision committees which proceeded with plans to write an Anglo-American code based on the "Paris Principles." Some differences between American and British practice precluded the joint committee's goal of a single text. The American Library Association published *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules: North American Text* in 1967.<sup>20</sup> The code stated in its introduction that its rules were "drawn up primarily to respond to the needs of general research libraries," but it did not define these needs.

Conditions emerging in the years following 1967 encouraged the belief that a new code was desirable. One of these conditions was an advancing computer technology which leaders in the library profession recognized as applicable to library cataloging processes. The Library of Congress's Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) program was tested in 1967 and implemented

in 1969. Machine Readable Cataloging suggested many possibilities for the future. One of these possibilities was editing an entire database's bibliographic information through automated procedures. Some far-sighted leaders in the profession believed the enhancements in cataloging processes brought about by developments in computer technology would greatly facilitate the implementation of a new catalog code, even one with many changes.

Still another condition contributing to the point of view that a new code was desirable was the gradual growth of an environment in which international standardization was not only found to be expedient but also easier to implement. A drift toward international standardization resulted. One step in this trend was the formulation of International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) at the International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts held in Copenhagen in 1969.<sup>21</sup> Shortly, librarians were discussing the feasibility of a single international code to be used in many countries.

Given this state of affairs, the American Library Association and the British Library arranged a meeting to discuss a revised code. It was held in Chicago in March of 1974. The United States, Great Britain, and Canada sent delegates, each representing its country's library association and national library, to prepare a memorandum of agreement and plan the project for writing a revised code. The delegates also established a Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of Anglo-American Cataloging Rules which was composed of representatives of each of the five organizations that were participating in the venture: the American Library Association, the Library Association, the Canadian Library Association, the British Library, and the National Library of Canada. The Joint Steering Committee was to be the ultimate authority for the content and presentation of this second edition.<sup>22</sup>

National committees were set up in each of the three countries to support the Joint Steering Committee's work. These committees introduced many of the proposals for revision and reviewed the draft texts of all of them. Throughout this process, the American committee — the Catalog Code Revision Committee of the American Library Association's Resources and Technical Services Division — sought the assistance of other Resources and Technical Services Division groups. And thirty organizations outside of the American Library Association were invited either to send representatives to the Committee meetings or to review the Committee's proposals. The Joint Steering Committee authorized publication of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed. in 1978.<sup>23</sup> A revised printing of this code was published in 1988.<sup>24</sup> The goals of this edition, including that of serving the needs of research libraries were based on those of *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules: North American Text* (1967).

Throughout the long process, expertise, experience, consultation among colleagues, intuition, and theory were the factors which determined the code's content. Though individual members were probably familiar with the results of previous studies, the committees involved did not themselves conduct empirical cataloging studies as part of their effort. Instead, the committee used Lubetsky's principles as a guide in formulating their code.

The purposes of a catalog are various. Traditionally, librarians have tended to agree that a catalog's main function should be to enable a user to determine whether the library has a certain item, which works of a particular author are in the collection, which editions of a particular work the library has, and what materials the library has on a particular subject. In short, a record should lead the user to a particular item in the collection, showing the user the location of the item, its physical description, and its subject content. It would seem that consideration of user needs and behavior

vis-a-vis library catalogs should be of value in fulfilling these purposes. If this is so, catalog use ought to play a part in the development of cataloging theory and practice. Knowledge of use can contribute an important empirical base for cataloging. Though authors of past codes had the catalog user in mind when creating their codes, there is no evidence of an empirical study of use of data elements in the bibliographic record affecting any of these codes.

Although such information as the extent of use of a given bibliographic element may not be sufficient reason for its inclusion or exclusion from the code and the records created using that code, the idea that there should be such a relationship is not new. In 1968, Michael Gorman stated that "the most vital aspect of cataloguing theory and practice which remains unexamined is the use made of the catalogue. Until the aim of catalogue construction has been clearly stated on the basis of objective and accurate surveys of catalogue use, all cataloguing theory will remain unscientific and open to doubt."<sup>25</sup> Despite the publication of *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed., in 1978 and its revised printing in 1988, the question of whether there should be such a relationship is still largely ignored. In his recently published article: "The Future of AACR2," John Boll suggests that a "thorough examination of the objectives and principles of all aspects of cataloging in the computer age" is now needed. One of his pre-conditions for a new code is that it "must take into account recent research findings on catalog use [and] general user studies."<sup>26</sup> The recognition that there is an important relationship between cataloging codes and studies is long overdue in the library profession. The accumulated data derived from catalog use surveys which employ valid and appropriate research techniques should be consulted whenever professional librarians consider revising cataloging codes, public catalog arrangements, and/or the content of bibliographic records.

## NOTES

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