

From ISBD(S) to ISBD(CR) A Voyage of Discovery and Alignment¹

by

Ingrid Parent

Abstract:

The development and maintenance of the various ISBDs, international standards that play a major role in universal bibliographic control, are the responsibility of the Standing Committee of the IFLA Section on Cataloguing. ISBD(S) has just been revised to take into account new developments in the production and dissemination of serial-type publications and is now known as ISBD(CR) – *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials and Other Continuing Resources*. Major changes to the standard were made in connection with revisions to both the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* and the *ISSN Manual*. These international standards for the descriptive cataloguing of serials and integrating resources have been harmonized to a great extent, thus facilitating access to these publications in all formats.

Keywords:

International Standard Bibliographic Description

Anglo American Cataloguing Rules

ISSN Manual

bibliographic standards

cataloguing

serials

integrating resources

continuing resources

harmonization of bibliographic standards

Ingrid Parent is Director General, Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services, National Library of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N4, Canada.

¹ © 2003, [The Haworth Press](#), Inc., Binghamton, New York, *The Serials Librarian*, Volume 43, issue 4. Article copies available from The Haworth Document Delivery Service. E-mail: docdelivery@haworthpress.com

From ISBD(S) to ISBD(CR) A Voyage of Discovery and Alignment

Introduction

After four years of discussions, revisions, consultations, reviewing, editing, correcting, negotiating, and a certain degree of amazement, the latest version of the *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials and other Continuing Resources*, or ISBD(CR), has been published by K.G. Saur on behalf of IFLA. This new publication includes many changes from the previous version, published in 1988. Fourteen years is a long time between revisions, but a revision was even more urgently needed because of the nature of the material being described and the differing publication patterns that have appeared due to the new technologies that are now used to produce and communicate information.

This revision was not done in isolation within the confines of IFLA, as I will describe later; however it is the product of a Working Group established by the IFLA Standing Committee of the Section on Cataloguing.

Background

The IFLA Section on Cataloguing has existed since 1935 and has produced several bibliographic standards and guidelines over the years which have greatly influenced the way libraries all over the world have catalogued their publications.

I believe that the most important achievement of the Section on Cataloguing, through its Standing Committee, has been the development and the almost universal adoption of the various International Standard Bibliographic Descriptions or ISBDs. The impetus for the development of these descriptive standards came out of the International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts held in 1969 in Copenhagen. In addition to formulating the first concepts related to universal bibliographic control, this international meeting recommended a standard bibliographic description which determined the order of data elements in a bibliographic record and the punctuation to be used.

By 1972 several national bibliographic agencies and national cataloguing codes had adopted the preliminary edition of the Standard Bibliographic Description for books, and over the next few years, several ISBDs for various formats were developed and adopted. While we casually speak about development and adoption over a few years, it is important to point out that many, many meetings, discussions and negotiations were necessary to achieve standardization of descriptive practices after, in some cases, a century of individual, divergent national cataloguing codes.

I refer to the various ISBDs as the “kids” of the Section on Cataloguing. There is now a whole family of ISBDs, and countries either use these ISBDs directly as their cataloguing

standard, or they incorporate the guidelines for description into their national cataloguing codes.

A systematic process of revision was established in 1978 when the Cataloguing Committee decided that ISBDs should come up for review every five years in order to maintain their currency and relevancy, but also to provide a certain degree of stability for libraries following the ISBD provisions.

However, it usually takes longer to produce a revision. Over the years the Cataloguing Committee has had a standing working group to decide on which revisions are necessary. This group may even recommend that a particular ISBD be abandoned or that a new one should be developed for some new format of material. At the present time there is an ISBD Review Group, chaired by John Byrum of the Library of Congress, which is fulfilling this function.

The ISBD(S) Working Group was therefore set up in 1998 and consisted of members from 9 countries with a wide knowledge of and experience in cataloguing standards.

The representatives were:

Alex Bloss, University of Illinois At Chicago, USA

Paul V. Bunn, The British Library, U.K.

John D. Byrum, Jr., Library of Congress, USA

Jean-Arthur Creff, Bibliothèque nationale de France, France

Karen Darling, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA

Zlata Dimec, National and University Library, Slovenia

Elise Hermann, Danish National Library Authority, Denmark

Jean L. Hirons, Library of Congress, USA

Unni Knutsen, National Library of Norway, Norway

Judith A. Kuhagen, Library of Congress, USA

Dorothy McGarry, University of California, USA

Ingrid Parent (Chair), National Library of Canada, Canada

Regina Romano Reynolds, Library of Congress, USA

Reinhard Rinn, Die Deutsche Bibliothek, Germany

Alain Roucolle, ISSN International Centre, France

Margaret Stewart, National Library of Canada, Canada

Sally Strutt, The British Library, U.K.

Edward Swanson (Editor), University of Minnesota, USA

Ljudmila Terekhova, Library of Foreign Literature, Russia

Alignment of the “stars”

In taking on this project, and chairing the Working Group, I soon realized that this process was much more than simply revising an existing text every 5 or 10 years.

Updating the standard is a challenge on its own. However, we embarked on a process that had much wider and serious implications for the processing of serial publications in the world. We had the rather daunting objective of developing a descriptive standard that

incorporated all the best and most relevant features of three major standards in international cataloguing: ISBD(S), AACR and the ISSN standard. Representatives of all three standards have been involved in this revision process right from the beginning. We wanted to achieve something special and unique in the area of serials cataloguing during this time of transition and rethinking of our rules brought about by the astounding growth of the Internet and the new formats of material. This opportunity for harmonization of various rules could not be missed and would tremendously benefit not only cataloguers, but more importantly, the many users of bibliographic information for serials.

Issues for Review

The Working Group began its consideration of the existing standard by requesting papers from its members on various issues to be resolved or decided upon as part of the review.

The topics identified for further study were:

- Scope of ISBD(S)
- Definition of a serial.
- Sources for description.
- Changes requiring new records.
- Multiple format issues.
- Relationship of title practice between ISBD(S) and ISSN.
- Transcription versus Identification.

- Key title as benchmark.

Some decisions were quickly made, that is, quickly on the international stage. Other proposed revisions were still being discussed as we went to press.

One of the first and major decisions of the ISBD(S) Working Group was that we would subscribe to the revision proposed by the AACR community to expand the scope of seriality to cover a new concept of serial publication, namely a publication that is integrating in natureⁱ. As cataloguers we have already had to deal with some types of integrating publications such as loose-leaves but we have never really been satisfied with their definition nor in the way they are catalogued: are they monographs or serials? Now, with the Internet, we must deal with many new types of ongoing publications that are integrating: each 'version' replaces the previous one. There are no successive issues. Therefore a new term was coined to describe this phenomenon, 'integrating resource'. Its definition is: A bibliographic resource that is added to or changed by means of updates that do not remain discrete and are integrated into the whole. Examples of integrating resources include resources that are loose-leaf for updating and Web sites.

The definition for 'serial' has also been modified. A serial is a continuing resource in any medium issued in a succession of discrete parts, usually bearing numeric or chronological designations and usually having no predetermined conclusion. Examples of serials include journals, magazines, electronic journals, directories, annual reports, newspapers, newsletters of an event and monographic series.

Together, serials and integrating resources constitute the concept of a Continuing Resource, which is a bibliographic resource issued over time with no predetermined conclusion.

“Continuing resource” is therefore the generic term for the types of publications covered by the revised ISBD(S). As a result the title of the standard was changed from ISBD(S) to ISBD(CR).

The definitions proposed, while sounding simple to accomplish, took many months of negotiations between the three standards groups. It was important to agree on these terms and definitions before we could proceed to other more substantive areas of differences.

The expansion of the scope to include integrating resources introduced a number of challenges. Because serials and integrating resources have different characteristics, it became clear to the Working Group that they would have to be treated in different ways.

One area that generated extensive discussion was what should be used as the basis for description of serials and integrating resources. We decided that for serials, using the first or earliest available issue provides a stable description since changes occurring in later issues are recorded in notes. This stability was felt to be beneficial in the context of record-sharing and for record identification and matching. However, for integrating resources, the concepts of “first” and “issue” do not apply, since even the source

containing the title can disappear or be replaced with each update! The Working Group, therefore, decided that the only practical approach for integrating resources is to base the description on the latest iteration.

The Working Group's discussion about the basis for the description brought up a number of concerns and viewpoints. Would it be confusing to have two different approaches to the description of continuing resources? Was it, therefore, time to move to basing the description on the latest issue for serials? This would not only simplify the standard by eliminating the need for separate provisions for serials and integrating resources but would also address the need expressed by some to have current publisher information provided in the *Publication Distribution, etc. Area* rather than in a note. These questions will no doubt be raised again at the time the standard is revised. With the benefit of experience, it is likely that some of these concerns will be more easily addressed.

The other major area of rapprochement is the challenging and time-consuming practices of title changes. The intention of our working group, which was endorsed by the other two standards groups, was to reduce the number of occasions where title changes occur and new bibliographic records need to be created. Most publishers probably do not understand cataloguers' reasoning when deciding on what is a major title change for what, to the publisher, is still the same publication. We also have to consider the needs of the user and how the user approaches information retrieval on an OPAC. It is therefore a balancing act between reducing the number of title changes and thereby saving time and effort, with the need to improve access to information.

The Working Group considered various factors in determining what is a major title change. We still came back to counting the number of words at the beginning of the title, and have settled on the first five words as the important words to count to determine whether there has been a major title change. We analyzed in great detail the impact of using different numbers of words; we also looked at this question by considering titles in languages other than English. Whatever rules we come up with must be appropriate for titles in all languages. We are developing an international standard, and we must ensure that the new ISBD will make sense to all users.

Although the Working Group determined that a major change in the title proper of a serial took place when there was a change in the first five words of the title, certain exceptions were agreed to in keeping with the overall goal of reducing the number of title changes and consequently new descriptions. The list of what to consider as minor title changes that existed in ISBD(S) was expanded to include: the addition, deletion, or change of words anywhere in the title that link the title to the numbering; the addition to, deletion from, or change in the order of words in a list anywhere in the title as long as the subject matter remains the same; and, the addition or deletion anywhere in the title of words that indicate the type of resource such as “journal” or “newsletter”. Finally, a new provision was added to instruct cataloguers not to create a new description if there was doubt whether the title change was major.

Of all the areas under review, the alignment of title change rules by the AACR, ISBD(S) and ISSN communities is, perhaps, the most important. Harmonization of this area is a significant and important achievement, resulting in many benefits for international cooperation, record exchange, and of course, cost savings.

Key title/Uniform title as benchmark to determine major changes

The idea of having a single approach to the unique identification of serial titles came up early on in our discussions as a means of eliminating the confusion and overlap caused by the existence of both the key title and uniform title in one record and as a way of providing a benchmark for determining title changes. We even gave this concept a name: International Standard Serial Title, or ISST.

The idea was first raised by some creative colleagues who believed that there must be a better way to uniquely identify a serial title, agreed to by all, and that was independent of any national cataloguing codes or network. The ISST would replace the existing key title in the ISSN network and ISBD(S) and most uniform titles established according to the AACR rules. The ISST along with the ISSN number would serve as the principal identifier for a continuing resource, and it would serve as the benchmark for determining when a title change would require a new bibliographic record.

While this proposal has many merits, it also has many implications that require careful consideration. The differences between the uniform title and key title qualifiers are not

insignificant and alignment will require compromise. Qualifiers are often names of corporate bodies, which raises the issue of different rules for establishing the authorities for corporate names. Because of the complexity of the issue, it has been put aside for "future consideration".

If all comments and suggestions from Working Group members and the IFLA community were to be incorporated, we would never produce a substantial standards document. Revision can be a never-ending process as new wording and examples are proposed and as new techniques for publishing and communication are developed. The revisers, just like the “discoverers”, had to deal with not only new types of publication patterns, new definitions, new OPAC display possibilities, but also with the requirement to remain compatible with the ISBD for monographic publications, which was under revision at the same time. Almost simultaneously we were required to incorporate the “optional” and “mandatory” features of the IFLA ground-breaking study of the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*ⁱⁱ[Footnote] and use its carefully chosen terminology throughout the ISBD(CR) text. If all this wasn't enough, add the fact that our objective was to align the ISBD(CR) with the revision work being undertaken at the same time by the AACR and ISSN communities.

But we must have been working under a “lucky star”. Amazingly, through hard work, dedication on the part of all the members not only within IFLA but also the AACR community represented by the Joint Steering Committee and the ISSN experts, and sheer determination, the ISBD(CR) has been published, the new chapter 12 of AACR covering

continuing resources is scheduled to be released soon, and the *ISSN Manual* has been revised.

The benefits to libraries and users of this alignment of the standards that were released almost simultaneously are tremendous:

1. There are increased opportunities for national and international record sharing which, in turn, reduces the cost of cataloguing (i.e. costs of original vs. derived cataloguing).
2. There is increased potential for international cooperative activities and projects (for example, creation of union lists).
3. There could be shared responsibility for ongoing maintenance of standards for serials and possibilities for joint problem-solving.
4. Since the Internet has made world-wide access to library catalogues possible, having one set of rules to describe serial publications in those catalogues would eliminate confusion for users, and cataloguers, trying to identify and locate material.
5. And finally, national bibliographic agencies could use one record for their national library catalogues and the same record for reporting to the international ISSN

register. Currently, some national bibliographic agencies create two records (one for their national library catalogue and the other for the ISSN register); others report to the ISSN register using records created for their national library catalogues thereby, in some cases, violating some of the provisions in the ISSN rules for cataloguing.

There are some very real and tangible benefits to harmonization for library users, cataloguers and library administrators.

This is a cause for pride, a belief that standards work is vitally important and that the library profession is at the forefront in finding creative ways of managing information and working together at the national and international levels to achieve consensus.

NOTES

ⁱ Jean Hirons and Crystal Graham, "Issues Related to Seriality," in *The Principles and Future of AACR: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Principles and Future Development of AACR*, ed. Jean Weihs (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1998), 180-213.

ⁱⁱ IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records: Final Report* (München: K. G. Saur, 1998).