Revisiting Ranganathan's canons in online cataloguing environment

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The paper examines the significance of Ranganathan's canons of cataloguing in the context of online catalogue and also investigates the extent to which these canons of cataloguing matches or fails with the principles of the new cataloguing code- Resource Description and Access (RDA).

Keywords: catalogue code; cataloguing canons; normative principles; online cataloguing; Resource Description and Access (RDA)

Introduction

S.R. Ranganathan gave a new dimension to cataloguing by developing canons of cataloguing. The canons are the normative principles of cataloguing developed on the basis of scientific method. These canons serve as the basis for following works:

i. Drafting of a catalogue code including the formulation of each rule.
ii. Interpretation of the rules to meet new situations brought out by a particular document or by changes in the practice of book production.
iii. Provision of suitable guidance for day to day cataloguing work.
iv. To help in making critical study of any catalogue code.

Bhattacharya highlighting the potentiality of the normative principles remarked that 'this set of normative principles of cataloguing is one of the outstanding contributions of India in the field of cataloguing. The potentiality and the versatility of these principles have not yet been fully realized by the library profession at large. Probably when first enunciated, these normative principles were ahead of time. However, their helpfulness and importance will be realized in due course'[1].

In the past, information was available only in printed form. Catalogues were prepared manually and served within the library. Therefore, the catalogue codes i.e. AACR-II and Classified Catalogue Code (CCC) were developed accordingly to suit that environment and are being used even today. But with the introduction of machine readable cataloguing (MARC) and library automation, catalogues are available in electronic form known as online public access catalogue (OPAC). It has given a new dimension to finding and collocating functions by providing more flexible structure than that of the card catalogue. It differs from card catalogue in many aspects. It helps users for better identification of entities in terms of their nature, scope and orientation through different data fields such as intellectual level, document type, genre, language code, geographic area code and additional notes[2]. Due to the proliferation of internet and WWW 2.0 tools, huge amount of information sources are available in different new media and formats such as text files, sounds, images, video clips.[3] All these have created a new environment which have greatly influenced the functionality of libraries and information centres. The prevalent cataloguing principles and rules are mainly meant for card catalogue and are inadequate to meet the requirement of the new electronic environment resources. Therefore, Resource Description and Access (RDA) has been introduced as the successor to AACR-II.

This paper analyzes the efficacy of cataloguing canons used in Classified Catalogue Code (CCC) in the context of online catalogue and to see what extent these are compatible with the principles of new code RDA. The larger aim of the paper is to examine the

relevance of Ranganathan's canons in the present day cataloguing systems.

Canons of cataloguing and their relevance today

Canons of cataloguing are the specific normative principles which provide a scientific basis to the field of cataloguing. These canons guide the cataloguers in their day to day work of cataloguing to achieve uniformity, consistency and accuracy. Though S R Ranganathan's, Classified Catalogue Code with Additional Rules for Dictionary Catalogue (CCC) was published in 1934, the canons of cataloguing was for the first time included in Theory of Library Catalogue published in 1938[4,5]. At that time only six canons were introduced. Then these canons were elaborated in its later editions. At present there are in all 9 canons that include:

Canon of Ascertainability

In the process of cataloguing, collecting bibliographic data is the first and foremost work. This canon is for selection of sources of information from the different parts of the document for preparing entries and taking decision about final authority. According to this canon, the title page and its overflow pages are the main source of cataloguing information, for the choice and rendering of the heading of main entry and specific added entries[4].

Canon of Prepotence

This canon is used in arrangement of entries. This canon helps to decide the position of an entry among the various entries in a catalogue. For this purpose, maximum weight-age is given to the leading section, and if it is not possible potency should be allowed to over flow to later sections and even this should be distributed in the decreasing order of intensity. Hence the purpose of this canon is to place the entry under the most potent part of the bibliographical information considering the purpose of the entry.

Canon of Sought heading

This canon helps in choosing headings for the catalogue entry. It prescribes that main entry and added entries heading should be chosen based upon the possibilities of the users' approaches to the library catalogue[4]. No element in a catalogue entry should be included which is not relevant to its purpose.

Canon of Individualization

The usefulness of the canon is immense because it helps in unique identification of the document in case of two identical data element. It reveals that appropriate individualizing elements should be added for the name of any entity[4]- be it of a person, a geographical entity, a corporate body, a series, a document, a subject, or a language- used as the heading of a catalogue entry should be made to denote one and only one entity which helps in easy identification and remove confusion.

Canon of Consistence

It helps in maintaining standardization of bibliographic data element in order to avoid adverse effect of variant usage. According to this canon, the rules of a catalogue code should be framed in such a manner that all the added entries of a document to be consistent with its main entry, the entries of all documents should be consistent with one another in certain essential points such as choice of headings, and style of writing the heading and the other sections.

Canon of Currency

It helps in selecting terminologies for a cataloguing code. The principle implies that current terminologies should be used to denote a subject of a catalogue entry.

Canon of Context

This canon helps in developing code, formulate rules and selecting terminologies. It prescribes that the rules of catalogue code should be formulated in the present context of the nature of cataloguing features of the book, prevalent in the mode of book production. Hence, the rules should be amended, revised and updated from time to time to keep step with the recent changes.

Canon of Permanence

This Canon deals with formulation of cataloguing rules. It prescribes that no element in an entry, the heading in particular, should be subjected to change by the rules of a catalogue code except the rules themselves are changed in response to the Canon of Context.

Canon of Recall Value

This canon helps in choosing heading for the catalogue entry and rendering style. It directs that the entry element and rendering style to be chosen should be the one having highest probability of being called back to memory by a majority of the readers.

Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

The OPAC's purpose and structure remain same as the card catalogue. But it adds a layer of functionality by providing various computer supported techniques for searching such as keyword searching, Boolean searching, truncation, proximity searching, and item identity number searching[3]. These were not possible in case of traditional catalogue. An OPAC has four major components: the user interface, the main master file of bibliographic records or catalogue database, the index, and the display/print format. And it's functioning is based on the catalogue database which works behind the scene. It contains a number of bibliographic records with each bibliographic record representing a catalogue entry containing all the bibliographic elements such as author, title, publisher, place of publication, year of publication, ISBN, and so on. In an online catalogue, bibliographic records, authority records and holdings records are maintained and they are interlinked with one another and arranged in a given order[6].

It may also include different index files such as keywords, author/any keyword from title, standard numbers, language of the item, country of publication, date of publication, type of material etc. Therefore, it goes far beyond the sequential author/title catalogue searching and permits dynamic linking, merging and rearrangement of those files.

In the process of creating a bibliographic record for an online catalogue the data needs to be entered in a structured format generally predetermined according to the requirements of software (the database management system) and different files are developed accordingly. These files may be developed being governed by canons, rules and principles formulated for the purpose. For example in OPAC, there are provisions for searching keywords and/or subjects. But we can't assign appropriate subject headings or keywords arbitrarily. Hence, using canon of sought heading and canon of currency is essential. These canons help in assigning befitting subject descriptors or keywords matching with the users approach and current terminology. As the system of capturing processing and displaying data in OPAC is different from the card catalogue, it does not obey all the canons. Hence, needs of revision in the context of database technology come into the picture.

Ranganathan's Canons and RDA

RDA (Resource Description and Access) is the latest addition to the field of cataloguing. It is a cataloging code published in June 2010 and is a predecessor of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, second edition (AACR2), mainly designed for the online environment. It is more principles-based, and better accommodates formats other than print[7]. RDA is based on two international conceptual models, FRBR and FRAD, developed by working groups of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). The code is based on following principles[8].

1st Principle deals with the User Convenience. Decisions taken in the making of descriptions and controlled forms of names for access should be made with the user in mind[9]. The end-user is kept in mind when cataloguing decisions are taken about description and names for access. This rule is confirming Ranganathan's canon of Sought heading. He also emphasises assessment of users' approach to catalogue is of paramount importance and all access points given in the catalogue should meet their requirements. Keywords and subject descriptors must be assigned keeping in view the user group being served[10].

2nd Principle discusses about the Common Usage. Normalized vocabulary used in descriptions and access should accord with that of the majority of users[9]. Vocabulary used in descriptions and access points should accord with that of the majority of users. Here application of canon of Sought heading and canon of currency is clearly visible. As Ranganathan wanted a catalogue should be as simple as possible which helps in saving the time and efforts of both the cataloguer and user. Therefore, while selecting vocabularies importance should be given to user's approach and current used terms.

3rd Principle is about Representation of bibliographical data. It implied that descriptions and controlled forms of names for access should be based on the way an information entity describes itself[9]. This principle followed canon of Recall value to some extend which also helps in choosing heading for the catalogue entry as well as rendering style. The importance is given to the way an information entity describes itself for description and access.

4th Principle relates with Accuracy. According to this rule bibliographic descriptions and access points should faithfully reflect the entities described. It reflects the canon of Consistence which implies there should be consistency among entries relating to choice of entry element, and style of writing.

5th Principle concerns the Sufficiency and Necessity. It is about choosing appropriate descriptors and controlled forms of names for access. It should include only those elements that are bibliographically significant, uniquely identify an entity and fulfil user requirements.It justifies the canon of context and canon of permanence.

6th Principle focuses on Standardization. It emphasizes descriptions and controlled forms of names should be standardized, to the extent and level possible. It reflects canon of Consistence.

Rest of the principles are related to Integration, Significance, Economy and 'Defensible-not arbitrary' which may not relate with canons but have conformity with Ranganathan's laws and principles of cataloguing, such as Law of Parsimony, Law of impartiality and Law of Interpretation.

It is seen that Ranganathan's canons have relevance even today as because they were built on the basis of a strong theory. But the only problem is there is no provision for capturing data of different forms of information available today. Hence, the CCC may not be satisfactorily used in today's environment as it is mainly focused on card catalogue.

Conclusion

Cataloging principles are the main base for catalogues and formulated on the basis of the objectives and functions of the catalogue. But, with the intoduction of online catalogue, avalibility of varied form of materials and delivery technologies has widen the objectives and functions of the catalogue. In addition to finding and collocating functions, online catalogue helps users to identify, to select, and to obtain/ access their information easily and quickly[2]. From the above discussion it is clear that Ranganathan's canons and priciples have some level of conformity with RDA principles. But to be valid in the advanced digital environment, these rules need to be revised, updated keeping in view the widen scop of the objectives and fuctionality of online catalogue. In this online environment there may be changes in the form of resources and mode of transmission but there is no change in connotation of bibliographic data. Therefore, there is no such essential difference in

what was done in the past with what is being done now and probably what will be done in the future in reference to cataloging[11]. The only difference is the formulation of the specific codes having conformity with the available technologies for handling materials of new format. It is needless to mention that Ranganathan's canons would have its inherent impact on designing and developing such new code.

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