

TO: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA
FROM: John Attig, ALA representative
RE: IME ICC 5.2.4 Forms of Uniform Titles

ALA thanks the CILIP representative for his thoughtful discussion paper, which raises a number of important issues that merit careful consideration. While ALA would like to see this discussion continue, our general sentiment is that para. 5.2.4 of the IME ICC Statement causes more problems than it solves. We are therefore not particularly interested in having the JSC explore aligning RDA with para. 5.2.4 of the IME ICC Statement. We would prefer that the JSC take a position against this paragraph in the Statement, based on the concerns we have raised; should this fail, we believe that the JSC should seriously consider differing from the Statement in this regard.

The following are the major arguments against alignment with para. 5.2.4:

1. The IME ICC provision introduces an element of subjectivity that threatens to complicate, not simplify, the process of assigning a uniform title. Determining the “most commonly known” title of a work in the language of the catalog suggests searching for “usage” and counting of results that would require even more work than the searches done to establish name headings. Current Anglo-American practices generally ground the process of establishing a uniform title in the search for a piece of factual information: the author’s original title. A “commonly-known title” is inherently unstable; if the concept is to be taken seriously, the decision would need to be continually re-evaluated in order to insure that the uniform title remained the most commonly known form.
2. Even within the same country, communities may vary in what would be considered the “most commonly known” title. Musicians would probably not think of “The Queen of Spades” as the commonly-known title of the Tchaikovsky opera “Pique dame” (neither of which is the current uniform title for the work, which is “Pikovaia dama”).
3. Is the Tolstoy novel *Voina i mir* most commonly known as “War and peace,” or is the translation is that is thus known?
4. If a commonly-known English title is used as the uniform title, then the uniform titles for both the original and translations become strange. Would the uniform title for the Russian original be “War and peace” or “War and peace. Russian”? Would the uniform title for an English translation be “War and peace. English” or “War and peace”? What would our users make of all this?
5. Uniform titles for parts of larger works could end up being in mixed languages, e.g., “Cinderella. Non più mesta” for the aria from the Rossini opera.

6. Uniform titles have a collocating and organizing function, both for expressions and for manifestations of the same work, as well as for works that have similar characteristics (such as the Beethoven piano sonatas). As constructed titles, they offer an opportunity to present diverse results in a logical order. Dropping the practices that have traditionally maximized this ordering (by extracting the “Moonlight sonata” and “Sonata pathétique” from an otherwise ordered list of Beethoven sonatas, for example) seems unhelpful.
7. By allowing cataloging agencies to make different – and basically parochial – decisions about the naming of works, the IME ICC provision does not promote exchange of data or support internationalization in cataloging.
8. Were the IME ICC provisions to be incorporated into RDA, it would require massive retrospective changes with questionable benefits.

We acknowledge the good intent of the provision – enabling users to bring the vocabulary at their disposal to the catalog and have a reasonable chance of success in discovering resources. However, we feel that this same objective could be achieved more effectively by using authority files to facilitate discovery and to allow more user-friendly displays, without compromising the order of the underlying data.