

TO: Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR

FROM: Hugh Taylor, CILIP representative

SUBJECT: IME ICC 5.2.4 Forms of Uniform titles

Background

At its April 2007 meeting, the JSC requested that the CILIP representative produce a discussion document on the principle issues for RDA if the current draft of the section on “Forms of uniform titles” in the IME ICC’s *Statement of international cataloguing principles* were to be ratified and to form part of the final version of that document.

The latest draft of the IME ICC principles, dated 6 March 2007 and updated following the 2006 meeting in Seoul, includes the following:

5.2.4. Forms of Uniform Titles

An authorized heading or uniform title for a work, expression, manifestation, or item may either be a title that can stand alone or it may be a name/title combination or a title qualified by the addition of identifying elements, such as a corporate name, a place, language, date, etc.

5.2.4.1 The uniform title should be the commonly known title in the language and script of the catalogue when one exists for the resource, otherwise

5.2.4.1.1. the uniform title should be the original title or

5.2.4.1.2. the title most frequently found in manifestations of the work.

Whilst much of the wording of 5.2.4 was either new to this specific draft or a revision of the previous version, the intent remains broadly as it has been in earlier drafts. It is worth emphasising, though, that the text has not yet been approved. Nevertheless, JSC noted that there are significant differences from the way(s) the forms of uniform titles were determined in AACR2 and felt that it was worth preparing for the possibility that the current IME ICC approach – or some version thereof that is broadly similar in intent – might be adopted in the final version of the *Statement*.

Commonly known title in the language and script of the catalogue

The main difference between AACR2 and the way the current IME ICC draft is conceived is in the choice of uniform title for most resources that require one (or to which the cataloguer chooses to apply one, rather). Note that the default position (5.2.4.1) is to create a uniform title that is “the commonly known title in the language and script of the catalogue”.

On the face of it, assigning such a uniform title benefits the user. Who, in the (literate, educated) English-speaking world, wouldn’t know *War and peace*? How many, on the

other hand, think of it as *Война и миръ*? Even amongst the liberal intelligentsia who frequent arthouse cinema, is Bergman's masterpiece known as *Det sjunde inseglet* or as *The seventh seal*? That one's a no-brainer. And in the concert halls of the English-speaking world, don't we all refer to Ravel's ballet as *Daphnis and Chloe* rather than by its French title (and devoid of any accents, in all probability)?

And yet...

The AACR2 rule relating to choice of uniform title that applies to most works and categories of work is 25.3A:

Use the title or form of title in the original language by which a work created after 1500 has become known through use in manifestations of the work or in reference sources.

Compared with the IME ICC proposal this has one great benefit – not only for cataloguers (!) but even for users – it's largely grounded in facts. It requires the provision of information that can be (and usually has been) verified; the decision the cataloguer makes is then expected to be more or less constant. Even where there is scope for uncertainty or ambiguity, the fact that consideration is restricted to manifestations in the original language, or to reference sources that cite a version of the title in the original language considerably reduces the likelihood of different cataloguers reaching different conclusions in respect of the same work.

Language

AACR2 25.3A generally leads to the use of a title in the original language of the work being described – although there are clearly difficulties applying this to works that themselves have no “language” (many works of art, for example). The IME ICC proposal leads to the use of a title in the language of the catalogue if a commonly known title exists for the resource; otherwise the uniform title is the original title or the title most frequently found in manifestations of the work (in the current draft it is unclear whether these are expressed in order of preference of their application or whether the choice is entirely at the cataloguer's discretion). For the user this means that some works will use the language of the catalogue they're searching and others the language of the work. In some cases this may match the user's own expectations; in others it may not. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding the information that an individual user brings to the search him/herself – something clearly unknown to either the writer of a set of cataloguing rules or to the individual cataloguer – there's also uncertainty about the language used for any individual uniform title.

But this inconsistency is itself not necessarily a “problem”, if the end result is a better match between (plural) users' (plural) expectations and the way resources are described and presented. And it's hard to see how that could fail to be the case in the *War and peace* example; only a very small percentage of users of the catalogue in the English-speaking world would know it under any other title.

Commonly known title

As has already been noted, AACR2 makes some provision for preferring the form of title which has become known to the one actually appearing on the resource, but is nevertheless quite restrictive compared to the less specific IME ICC statement. The latter applies the concept when a commonly known title exists in the language of the catalogue. It is only too easy to think of situations in which different people would come up with different answers to the question “Is there a commonly known title for this work in English” – by way of an unscientific test, try asking (or, rather, answering) it for *La porte étroite* (Gide) or *Götterdämmerung* (Wagner) – and it’s not unknown for different territories within the same language community to come to know a work by different titles (or different spellings of the same title).

Just as a work occasionally comes to be known by a title in its “own” language other than the original one so the title by which that work might be known in other language communities may change over time. The established title of a literary classic changes as the popularity of a particular translation waxes then wanes. The concept of a “commonly known title” becomes less stable away from the original language, so there is likely to be less permanence to the title selected in the language of the catalogue (where this is not the language of the work itself) than by following the existing AACR2 rubric.

At the very least, the adoption by RDA of the principle of a “commonly known title” would require fleshing out how this concept should be interpreted and applied.

Other issues

AACR2 has a significant number of variations and exceptions to its general principle – many would regard this is a major weakness in any defence of the status quo. Whilst each of them individually might make sense to the community of users whose special interests are represented in these differences, nonetheless it could be argued that, collectively, they add to the hypothetical poor user’s confusion or uncertainty. Some of these different approaches are actually much closer to what the IME ICC draft currently proposes, in that they prefer the language of the catalogue (English for AACR2’s core constituencies).

Even here, though, full-scale adoption of IME ICC would lead to forms of uniform title that may beg as many new questions as they answer old ones. In a high-level discussion paper such as this it would be inappropriate – and risking unintended somnolence in some readers – to try to work out what such a change might mean for all of the existing AACR2 rules. But to give a flavour of the sort of issues that would need further discussion and resolution, here are a couple of consequences that might cause brows to furrow.

Parts of a musical work. The uniform title for the part of a musical work actually comprises more than one title. Assume, for the moment, that the application of the IME ICC instruction results in the anglophone title *The magic flute*, but that the application of

the principle of a “commonly known title” for any individual aria results in that aria being entered under its German title (a situation likely to be quite common with operas where most of the great works originated in continental Europe and are in foreign languages but from which few have individual arias sufficiently well-known to have a commonly-known English-language title). Result: a uniform title whose first part is in English and whose second part is in the original language – something like the following:

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791

The magic flute. Seid uns zum zweiten Mal willkommen

One user might find having expressions and manifestations of the complete opera collocated under its well-known English title very helpful; but the user looking for (and, hopefully, locating) individual arias might balk at such linguistic charivari.

Types of compositions. AACR2 is not just about preparing individual catalogue entries, but has more than a passing interest in catalogues per se. For types of compositions, the instructions are concerned not just with consistency of structure and collocation of expressions/manifestations of individual works but of all of a composer’s works in particular musical forms. The impact of the IME ICC draft here could be considerable – Beethoven’s *Archduke Trio*, Shostakovich’s *Leningrad Symphony*, Mozart’s *Haffner Serenade* could all (in the event of them being recognised as the commonly known titles of these works in the English-speaking world) end up being separated in catalogues from other piano trios by Beethoven, symphonies by Shostakovich and Mozart serenades respectively.

Conclusion

Even in a high-level paper whose purpose is to stimulate discussion it can be seen that there are pros and cons for both positions. Arguably, adoption of the IME ICC draft would require some watering down – in the form of clarification, additional instruction, exceptions – of the simple statements found in the draft. But that process could only follow on agreement to adopt *in principle* the IME ICC approach. It almost goes without saying that any change raises issues of compatibility with existing data.

Constituencies are asked to indicate in their response whether or not they favour JSC and the Editor exploring the alignment of RDA with para. 5.2.4 of the IME ICC statement.