UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

TO:           Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR            DATE:  July 13, 2005
                                                                                                     (rev. Oct. 7, 2005)

FROM:        Barbara B. Tillett, LC Representative

SUBJECT:     Self-describing vs. Not Self-describing items; Discussion Paper for the
                    JSC

Amidst discussion of the problems with published/unpublished came the idea of taking a different perspective to instead look at resources as to whether or not they self-describe. Self-describing means there is some readable text or understandable sound that conveys the descriptive data elements needed to identify the item or manifestation.  That text or sound is then transcribed (by human or machine) to the appropriately tagged/labeled field in a bibliographic description or to the appropriate location in a citation.

The principle of representation, where we transcribe information from the item to identify it in our bibliographic records, only holds when we have information to transcribe. Otherwise, it is understood that the cataloger will provide descriptive information that accurately represents the item being cataloged.

The published/unpublished division of the world seems to present more problems than it helps.   We now have different rules that require the cataloger to know if an item is published or not.  We arbitrarily declared that remotely accessed electronic resources are all "published" for purpose of knowing which rules apply.  Other than just declaring a category published, how do we know if the item we have is published or not?   Should it really matter?

It may be of interest to the acquisition librarian trying to get a copy, but the identifying information would make it clear whether or not there is a publisher or a distributor or manufacturer.  The cataloger doesn't need to know if it actually was published or not.

Some people feel AACR has given second-class treatment to the unpublished resources, but now that we are working towards a new code that is to address all types of resources, it's time to reconsider this approach. (In fact, AACR has probably gone overboard to give special rules for unpublished materials that we now may feel are not that 'special.')

A possible solution worth discussing is writing rules in terms of the evidence the cataloger sees.  When an item has information to identify itself (metadata in the form of

text on a title page, which is the classic situation around which AACR revolves; displayable text (tagged or not) on a digital object; a label on a slide; etc.) we should take it. Taking what we find means no second-guessing or researching.

When the item has no such self-describing information, we need to supply the essential elements to meet the FRBR user tasks (find, identify, select, obtain). This also requires us to identify which elements are essential to meet the user tasks. We might do this by flagging the elements (title and date?) that <u>must</u> be transcribed or "devised" by the cataloger – perhaps in our minimal set in the "levels" and reinforced in specific rules – the Web format could even indicate which are mandatory – just some ideas.

We may choose to supply the missing element or not, depending on the necessity of the element to meet user tasks. Our rules can explain what to do when the information for a particular data element is not on the item. For example, when we need a title, the cataloger will supply one (as we do now for manuscripts and archival materials). When there is no date, one could provide the metadata for date, with "undated" or some such term that is easily understood by the end user (patrons and library staff alike) of our bib records.

We need more discussion about place of publication and publisher when such information is presented in an ambiguous way or is completely missing. What alternative is meaningful to what types of resources? We already account for publisher, manufacturer, distributor, but what other roles would be appropriate here and what should we call this element? When there is no place, can we generalize some guidelines that will be meaningful for librarians' needs as well as citation practice? We know there are citation practices in the archival community and for visual resources to provide the place of creation.

We also need to provide for resources that appear to be self-describing but actually reflect the self-description of an earlier manifestation (as with photocopies, microforms, and some reproductions and republications). A suggestion is to explain that the self-described information is from the original, when that is known to be the situation.

RDA is to be arranged by data element, which gives us a perfect structure to indicate what to do when there is information to transcribe and when there isn't.

If we can agree that this approach would be interesting to pursue, I would be willing to offer some sample rules (that would need everyone's help to improve) to test moving in this direction.