From AACR2 to RDA: an Update

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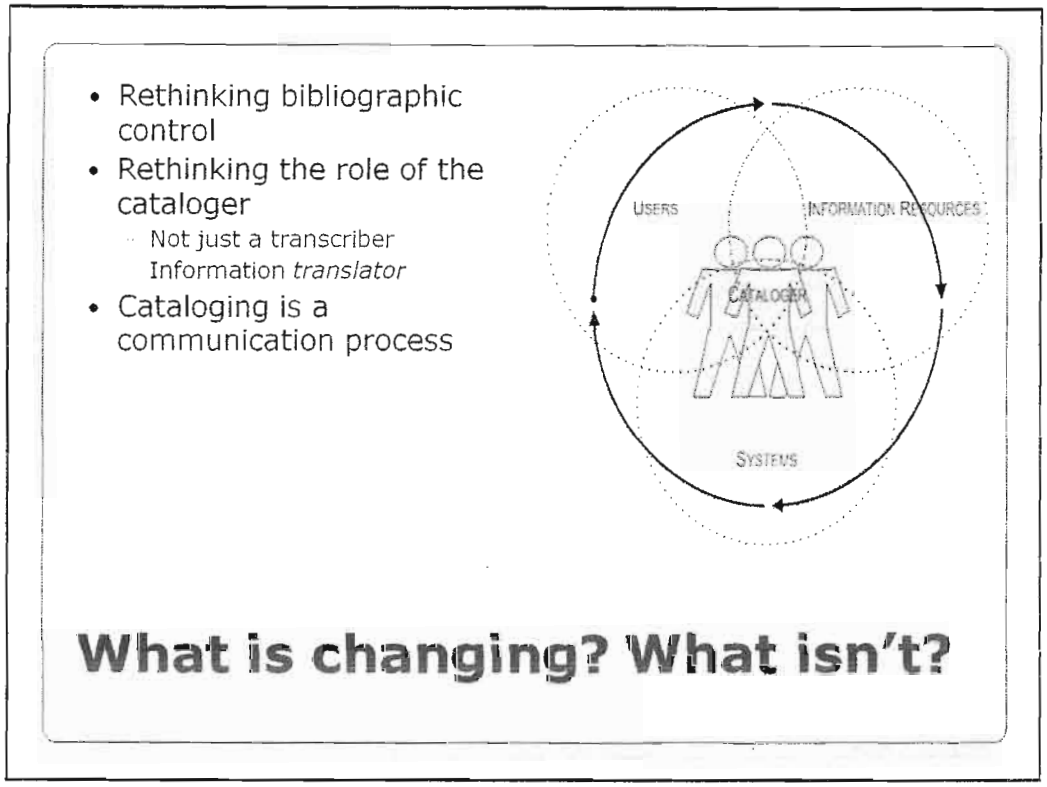


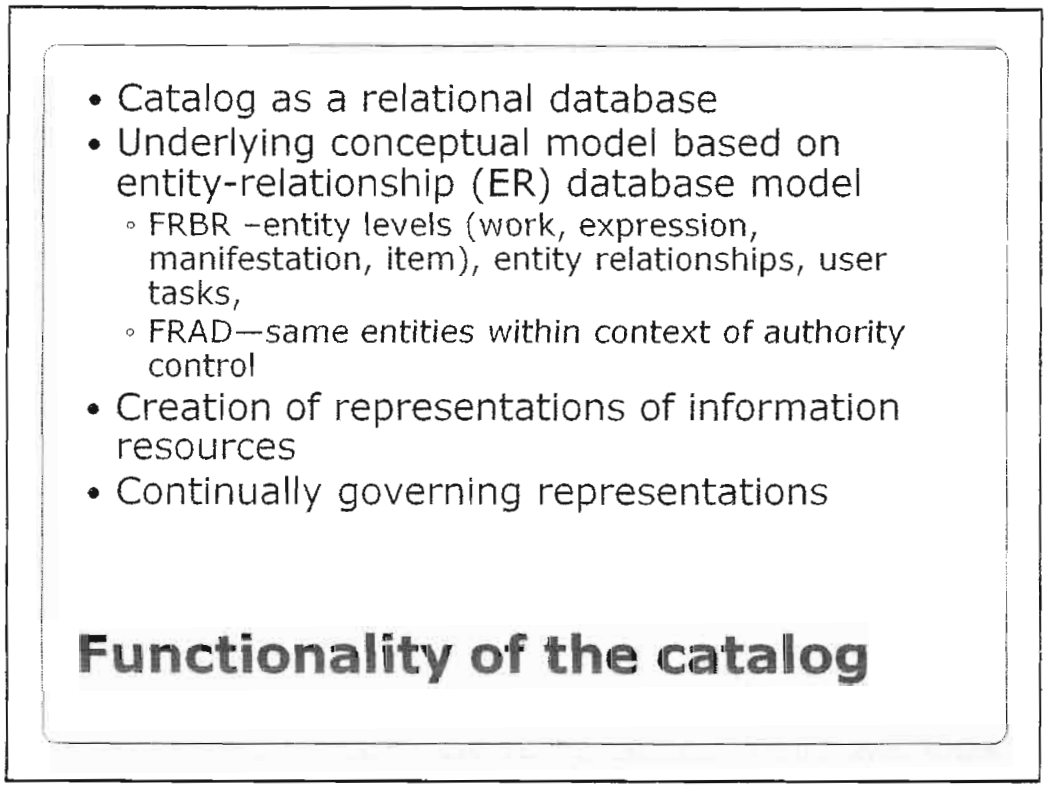
In recent years, there has been a call put out by the international cataloging community to rethink bibliographic control for the current information environment. Many have criticized the cataloging profession for not keeping up with the demands of times in terms of the volume of information produced and the types of information resources that are being created and used. There have been intense debates about how much change is needed, what needs to be thrown out, and what needs to be retained in terms of cataloging processes, tools, resources and standards. One of the more intense debates concerns the very existence of the library catalog and while a catalog may function as portals to other information resources or databases, is not the primary purpose of a catalog still to represent the resources found in or linked to a particular library collection?

There is a underlying urgency to questions such as these because of the perceived threat from the non-traditional technology resulting from user's ever increasing dependence on and confidence in the Internet and the Web for information. The question has been asked—are libraries still important now that search engines have become so powerful and offers such quick searches? (not necessarily "precise" searches.) There is no definitive answer.

Regardless, I think we can all agree that the role of the cataloging is changing—the catalogers role in this information environment in terms of the goals of organization and control of information resources. It isn't enough to simply create records with a certain set of data. Cataloging is a communication process in which catalogers function as translators, or interpreters, of information and information resources.

This involves translation between the user and the information resources, but also translation between the resource and the system itself. This act of translation, when done well, should enable the system, the user, and the information resources, to come together on common ground. Now, I have a graphic on this slide—its overly simplified—but it gives a sense of where the cataloger functions...

For example, the librarian once interpreted search results for the user, or at the very least with the user, but this is happening less and less, if at all. Users search alone within the catalog system and the only voice the librarian may have, and thus the only guidance they can give, is the catalog record itself.



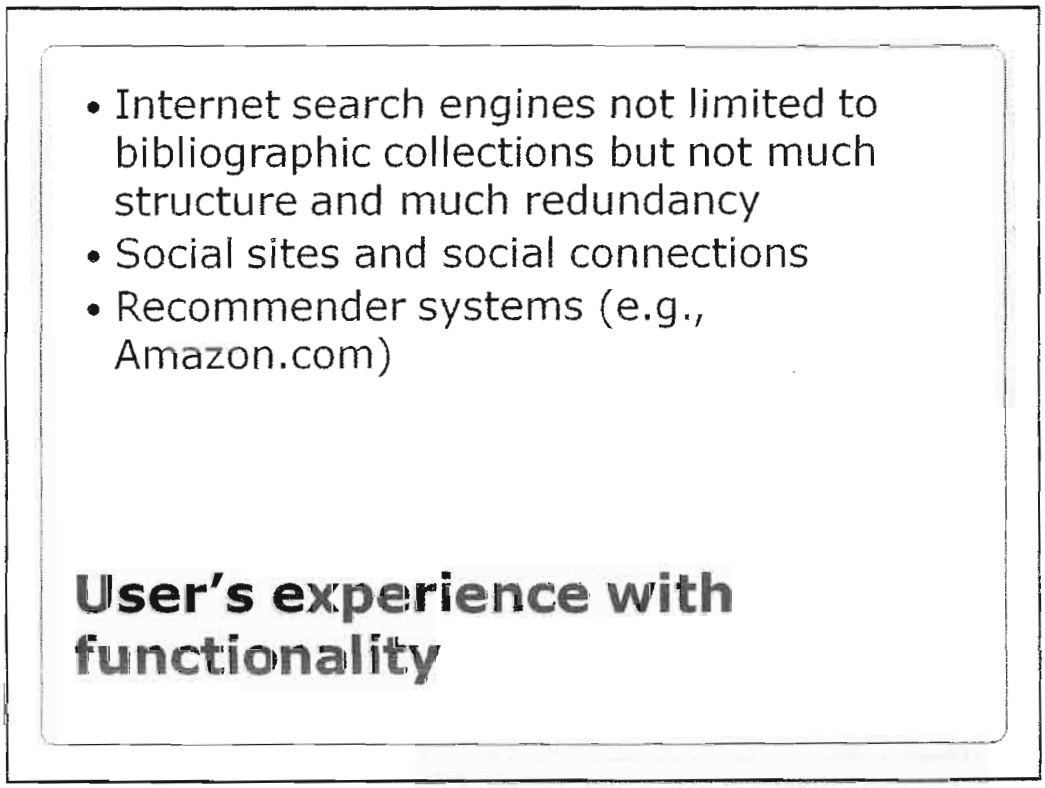
Its very important for catalogers to understand not only the process of bibliographic control, but also of the underlying conceptual model of the catalog as a relational database based on the entity-relationship model. [1]

I feel this is an area in which many catalogers are deficient. They must understand the core principles guiding the construction and maintenance of system. Most importantly, the cataloger needs to know why information is organized in a certain way in order to help the user accomplish certain tasks as they search a collection of information resources.

FRBR and FRAD are an important step towards this understanding because it gives us a model based on relationships between entities and tasks that need to be supported by the kind of data we input and how it is structured.

A database starts with a conceptual model. What do we want the database to do ? What kind of data does it need? How do we put data in it? How do users get information out of it? How do choices made about conceptual models affect how a person retrieves information?

Catalogers are not limited to just the creation of representations or surrogates of information resources. Instead, they are involved in continually governing (controlling) those representations within the context of an information system. This governing has a direct affect on the access to that information by users, information professionals and the information system itself.



What have user's become used to in terms of user experiences of functionality? They are used to....

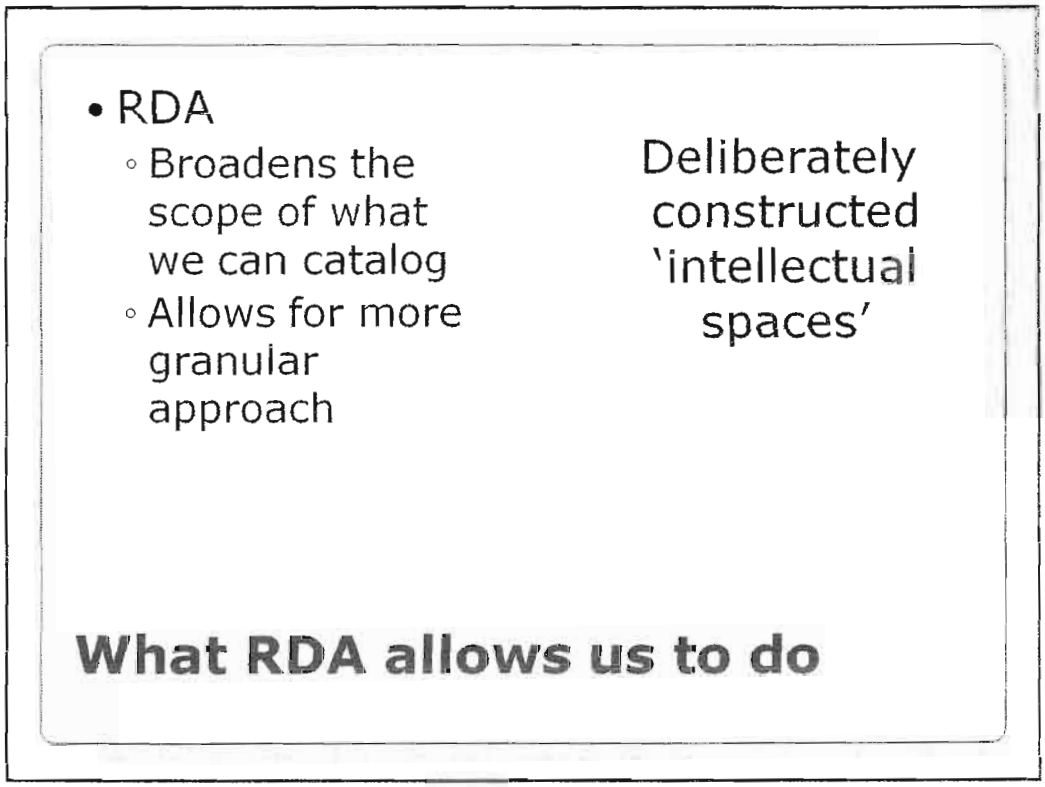
•Internet search engines not limited to bibliographic collections but not much structure and much more redundancy

•social sites and social connections

•recommender systems (e.g., Amazon.com)

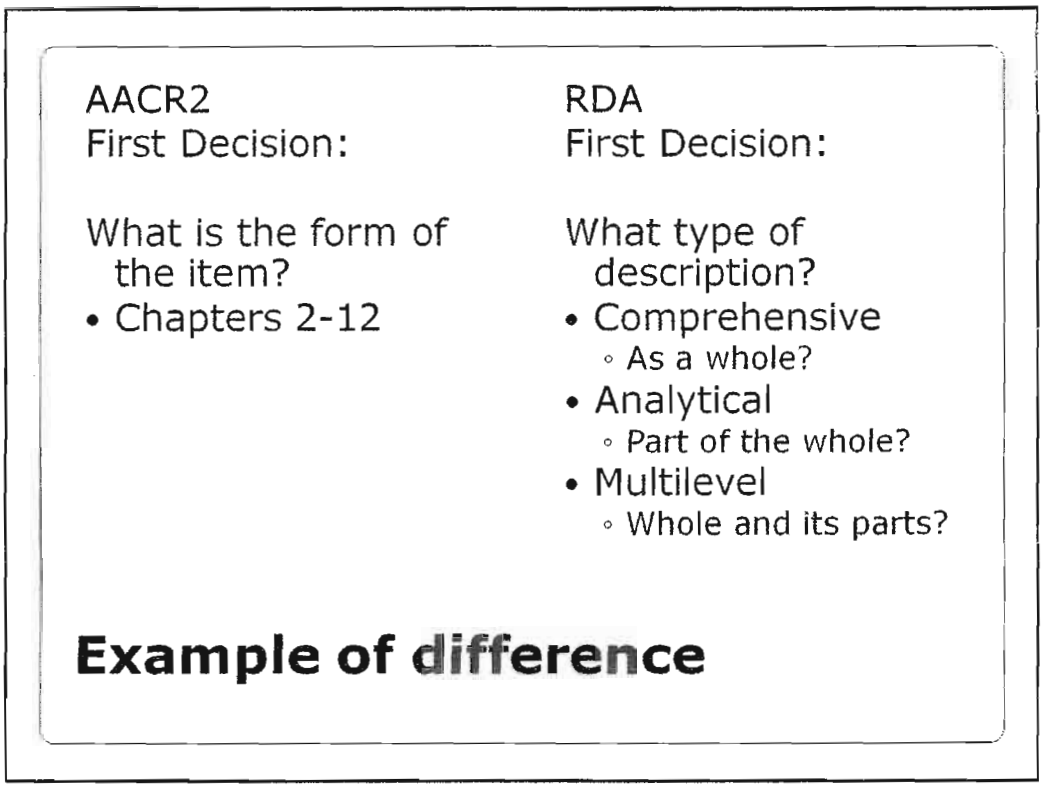
The overall problem is that all these additional functions add amazing complexity to already complex library catalogs and so must be controlled.

The use of the ER model in FRBR and FRAD does not get into some issues raised by Internet search engines, social relationship issues, and recommender systems. This is not because they are not wanted, but because it has been a major effort simply to apply ER model to basics of cataloging.



RDA is not a complete change in the rules, in many ways it is a reconfiguration of what we already do now. At the same time, it is both a broadening of the scope of what we catalog, in terms of information resources, as well as a more granular approach to providing access to these "intellectual spaces"

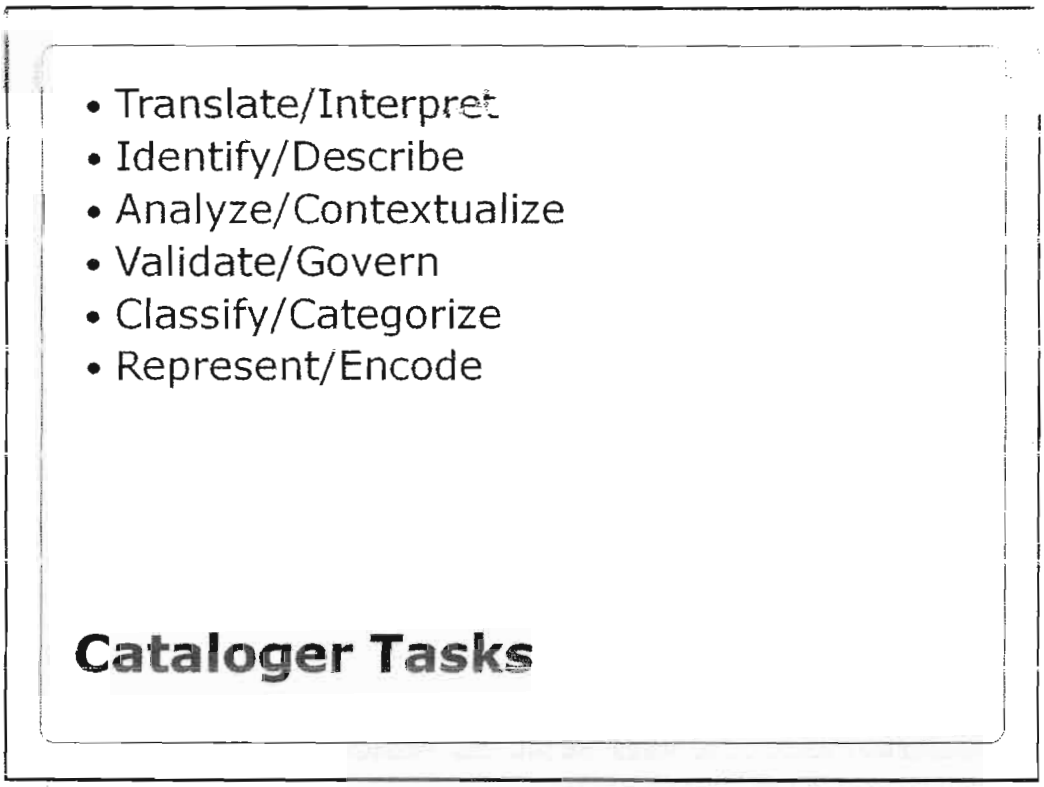
So, in other words, the "catalog" is not going away, rather how we deliberately construct and how users access the catalog is changing.



An example of the difference of the two sets of rules...

With AACR2 our first decision what to decide what chapter to use to create a record—this was based on form (book, maps, manuscripts, etc.).

In RDA, form is no longer a central feature. We must first decide what type of description we want to provide. Do we want to describe the item as a whole (comprehensive)? Do we want to describe a part of the whole (analytical)? Do we want to describe the whole and its parts (multi-level)?



Lastly, I've been playing around with the idea of cataloger's tasks—FRBR and FRAD, and the upcoming FRSAD, all have user tasks (find, identify, select, obtain, explore, navigate, etc). But what are tasks that a cataloger performs?

We translate/interpret information resources—this can be likened to what in the past has been called the "technical read" .
We identify and describe resource attributes, both carrier and content.
We analyze the subject content (subject analysis) and provide a context for the resources in terms of content attributes and subject relationships between resources
We validate/govern access points (name, subject, title, etc.) using the process of authority control
We classify and categorize resources using library classification systems (closely related to analyze and contextualize)
Overall, we represent information resources within a system and make the representation usable by encoding it with international standards such as MARC, DC, XML, etc.

Again, these are just my preliminary thoughts on cataloger tasks. I hope to expand on these in my book.