1999 marks ACIG’s fifteenth year as an ALA interest group. This session took the occasion as an opportunity to reflect on where authority-control issues stood today vis-à-vis 1984, and perhaps as a prod toward further work in an area suffering from a relative dearth of published literature. Walking down Memory Lane, Rebecca Dean, ACIG chair, identified three "hot items" of 1984 – the Linked Systems Project (LSP) that enabled the bibliographic utilities to "communicate" with the Library of Congress, defining "authority control," and loading the Library of Congress Name Authority File into local catalogs – and two shortcomings – the lack of an online subject authority file, and the small size of the NACO program at that time. She then introduced five speakers who traced developments in broad areas of concern.

1. Personal and corporate names (Mary Charles Lasater)

The adoption of AACR2 by the Library of Congress in 1981 and the subsequent changes it brought to authority work for access points was a major impetus for the founding of ACIG. Lasater identified major trends – more authority records, more libraries creating them for shared use in more places, more access points on older records being upgraded to AACR2 with supporting authority records (though the cessation of making linking references in authority records has made online verification and correction more difficult, Lasater maintains), more possibilities for established headings to be changed, not only by LC but also by NACO participants. When there is no mechanism for conveying the changes easily and effectively to users, this has caused problems, even in a program such as PCC which places great stock in having all the headings in a core record under authority control. Keeping up with the "marriages" and "divorces" in undifferentiated personal name headings is another maintenance challenge. Future developments will include the change from Wade-Giles to pinyin romanization for Chinese names and (possibly) the liberalization of guidelines for making references.

2. Uniform titles (Karen Little)

ACIG’s founding coincided with a period where "cooperation" was a buzzword; the establishment of the NACO Music Project was a major step forward, since music catalogers are major users of uniform titles. The early 1990’s saw the fruition of work to allow automatic generation of authority records from bibliographic records. One failure was the attempt to persuade MARBI to move information from MARC field 240 to corresponding subfields in 1xx fields, which would facilitate automated matching of headings. In the middle of the decade, OPAC vendors seemed to have finally "caught on" to authority files and the need to make them usable in an online catalog. Recent developments have been the harmonization of several MARC formats and the internationalization of the LC authority file. Karen concluded that the concept of cooperation is still strong, but that many technical issues still remain unsolved. A question for the future – are patrons really being helped by what we do?

3. Series headings (Charlene Kellsey)

By 1984, several important milestones had been reached – the definition of the MARC Format for series authority records and record creation (notable in that all machine-readable records for series headings are AACR2), and the beginning of NACO contributions in 1982. LC’s proposal to abandon series authority work was a jolt to the cataloging community, but one that seems to have prompted needed re-examination of the rules and LC Rule Interpretations as part of the decision to continue authority work. Some issues still remain – problems caused by the dual role of MARC 440 as descriptive element and access point, variations among local systems in filing and indexing, questions of precision vs. cost/benefit (with catalogers usually on the left side and vendors on the right), a corollary need for more data on how catalog users employ series fields in their searching to see if it’s worth all the fuss, and accommodating local practices in multiple levels of shared environments (bibliographic utilities, consortia, union catalogs) for series treatment decisions (classification, tracing, analysis).
4. Subject headings (Stephen Hearn)

Hearn recommended a 1991 ALA publication, Subject authorities in the online environment: papers from a conference program held in San Francisco, June 29, 1987 as a good starting point for tracing progress. Subject headings were the last major category to be brought into the MARC Authorities format. Slowly, systems are making more sophisticated use of the references, scope notes, and complex references in records. The SACO program is broadening the scope of headings in the authority file, and the implementation of simplification proposals for subject subdivisions has had some impact. The definition of subfield v for form/genre subdivisions and 18x fields in the MARC Authorities format for such subdivisions illustrate what Hearn predicted will be a trend toward more elaborate coding, with a hoped-for effect of simplifying life for users. He also forecast a continued move toward multiple thesauri, and perhaps a general move toward having authority records included in Boolean searches. As in other areas, a big question is getting adequate payback for all the effort.

5. Local systems (Ruth Bogan)

Bogan defined "local system" as what’s inside a vendor-supplied software program. Authority control was low on the priority list for vendors in the early days because of high cost and low demand. ACIG itself exemplifies the efforts made to build interest in change and improvement. By 1996, most vendors offered some sort of authority control in their products, but Bogan noted that there was (and is) no "dominant design" that commands the allegiance of the marketplace, nor a shared sense of approach to automated authority control.

Ann Della Porta then gave the LC report. She mentioned developments in international authority control within IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations), especially the development of standards for minimal-level authority records, including a basic set of 19 data elements considered necessary in a shared environment (there can be viewed at http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/p1996-2/mlar.htm ). She mentioned LC implementation schedules for changes in the Authorities formats, and offered news on the progress of the ILS (Integrated Library System) implementation at LC. October 1999 is the target date for bringing up all modules of what will be called "LC ILS." There will be many new features and capabilities for LC staff. Non-LC catalogers who currently use MUMS for NACO purposes will notice some changes in functionality. Authority records will not be displayable in the MARC format; there will be no functional equivalent to the current search limit to the "permanent file;" and authority records will not be included in keyword searches. In subsequent correspondence with the BCC representative, Ms. Della Porta elaborated, "Anyone looking at the LC OPAC will not be able to see full MARC authorities, even those that are used on LC bib records. We will have the benefit of cross references and scope notes that will direct users to authorized forms. This means that librarians will not be able to access our authority records via Z39.50. We sincerely hope that this lack of access to authority records will be temporary. We are working with Endeavor to get this resolved in the future."

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