

## An Interview with Barbara Tillett



Since 2009, the German National Library (DNB) has been conducting a series of interviews with people involved in the new cataloguing standard Resource Description and Access (RDA). This time, DNB talked to Dr. Barbara B. Tillett, Chief of the Policy and Standards Division, Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate at the Library of Congress, who is also a member of the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (JSC). Barbara Tillett is one of the library profession's leaders who is helping to lead bibliographic control into the future and has been paving the way for new ideas such as the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) and Linked Open Data to serve library users worldwide.

1. Dr. Tillett, a couple of weeks ago, the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine and the National Agricultural Library announced their decision on the implementation of RDA. They followed the recommendation of the US RDA Test Coordinating Committee to adopt RDA with certain conditions and not earlier than January 1, 2013. What was your reaction? How did you feel?

**Tillett:** I was a member of the US RDA Test Coordinating Committee, so had been involved with the development of the recommendations. To have the final decision publicly available was a relief, coming after several years of work to test reactions to RDA within the United States and to analyze the results of that test and recommend areas for improvement and future directions.

2. One of the recommendations is to rewrite the text of RDA. This has implications – not only for translations and training materials. What will happen to the current RDA text? Will it be rewritten from the scratch?

**Tillett:** I do not anticipate that the text will be rewritten from scratch. During the recent American Library Association conference in New Orleans, Troy Linker and Beacher were characterizing the activity as “rewording” to be clearer and easier to understand. The content of the RDA instructions would not be changed in the rewording process. There was also renewed discussion of preparing a “Concise RDA” as a more simple approach for people who want a print product to be read linearly. RDA currently is intended to be a Web tool. The Committee of Principals that governs RDA will be meeting in early August to discuss various options, so we should be hearing more about a “rewrite” soon.

3. Library of Congress has been testing RDA for three months. What were the results of this test?

**Tillett:** The results from the US RDA Test were not differentiated by the participating institution, so I do not have results that are specific to the Library of Congress. The general test findings revealed that creating RDA records became faster over time, as individual

catalogers gained more experience using the new instructions, with an overall average of 31 minutes to create an original cataloging record. The test included responses from reference staff and others using the RDA records and most of their comments were very favorable. Other findings covered training and documentation suggestions, recommendations for improving the Toolkit and some areas for content proposals, impact on local operations, and some areas of costs and benefits. The full report is available at <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda>. Many of the areas suggested for improving the content of RDA reflected issues already being addressed by the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (JSC) and the ALA Publishers in response to feedback on the RDA Toolkit.

4. Were there any results that surprised you?

**Tillett:** Not really. Some of the responses early in the test reflected areas where we should have provided more training to avoid misunderstandings and others were commenting on missing features of the RDA Toolkit that were later added, such as the index.

5. Besides the test, what did the Library of Congress do in the past months with regard to RDA?

**Tillett:** The Library of Congress provided training and training materials, including charts, exercises, examples, as well as documentation on interim policy decisions regarding options and alternatives in the RDA instructions. We sent out queries to the library community regarding the longstanding US practices for abbreviating Dept. in authorized access points and regarding the treatment of reproductions (that was in fact in violation of AACR2). We are now launching a Website that should be available in the next couple of weeks to provide a place for all of the RDA planning by the Library of Congress that will include our documentation, training materials, updates on activities, links to other relevant data, such as the initiative to transform the bibliographic framework (i.e., the MARC format), and a general FAQ on our process as we prepare for RDA implementation.

6. The editor of RDA, Tom Delsey, developed 3 scenarios for the implementation of RDA. Did the Library of Congress explore ways to implement RDA? Which one of the scenarios will you choose to implement RDA? Do you think of a multistage process?

**Tillett:** As we begin the new initiative to explore transforming the bibliographic framework (see <http://www.loc.gov/marc/transition/>) we will be doing this sort of exploration. For the present time we only have the Integrated Library System (ILS) and MARC formatted bibliographic, authority, and item records to work with. RDA will work in such an environment, but will achieve many more benefits for libraries when moved to a more FRBR-based, linked data environment where data can be shared more openly on a global scale.

7. Will the Library of Congress represent work AND expression levels? With regard to MARC 21 - as bibliographic or as authority data?

**Tillett:** Current MARC bibliographic records already represent work and expression level data, as do authority records for uniform titles – it's a mix now with MARC 21. In agreement with the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, LC will continue to use authority records to record data for works and for expressions (as well as for persons, families, corporate bodies, and our LC subject headings). In bibliographic records with the MARC format, we also will continue to identify the contained and related works/expressions through the traditional means, such as 130 uniform titles, 4XX series statements, 505 contents notes, 7XX added entries for the creators/preferred titles of the contained works, etc. We look forward to the future beyond MARC where we can describe the entity by its identifying characteristics and re-use that data in new and creative ways, not just restricted to linear displays for online catalogs.

8. Some time before the decision on RDA, the Library of Congress announced the Bibliographic Framework Transition Initiative. How will that initiative influence LC's plans with RDA?

**Tillett:** As noted above, this exciting initiative is a key component in LC's plans for moving our bibliographic data and access to our collections and other resources into a new era accessible through global communication channels.

9. You are the Library of Congress representative on the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA. Would you reveal some of JSC's plans for the near future?

**Tillett:** The JSC has developed a "fast-track" process for simple corrections directly fixing errors in the content and continues our process for formal proposals that need discussion among the constituencies and other interested parties. The formal proposals would more significantly change the content of the RDA instructions. Proposals from anywhere in the world are welcome – for example, Germany and other countries can send proposals to the JSC Chair, Alan Danskin. Proposals from JSC constituencies continue to go through their representative. The JSC conducts much of our work with conference calls and email communication to move forward on the list of "issues to be addressed after the first release" and many of those proposals will be addressed at our next meeting. The next face-to-face meeting of the JSC will be November 2-4, 2011 in Glasgow, Scotland. We also are resuming conversations with various communities to help move instructions that were carried forward from AACR2 towards the more principle-based, international content code that RDA was envisioned to be. This also includes continuing discussions with the ISBD and ISSN communities to resume harmonization meetings with those groups. The JSC also has new tools for quickly updating RDA in collaboration with ALA Publishing, the organization that runs the RDA Toolkit and the associated registry of RDA vocabularies available freely on the Web. The new tools include an editing capability that is also being used for translations of RDA and for updates to our Library of Congress Policy Statements that are freely available through the RDA Toolkit. All of this has been continuing under the existing governance structure that will be re-examined and very likely changed by the Committee of Principals that oversees the work of the JSC and the funds that support this work. The Committee of Principals will be meeting in early August 2011 in Washington, D.C.

10. RDA is the first really international cataloguing code although librarians from beyond the Anglo-American region sometimes feel that the text is too much guided by the needs of that community. Has JSC developed any ideas for RDA to become even more internationally?

**Tillett:** Yes, one of the main goals for RDA was to make it truly international. Work vigorously continues towards that goal, and the JSC welcomes proposals from around the world towards that goal. As noted above, there will soon be more progress towards changing the governance structure to enable full international participation.

11. We anticipate quite a number of changes in RDA in the near future. How does JSC ensure that the community learns about the changes?

**Tillett:** There is the practical annotation of the updates and listing of changes that will appear in the RDA Toolkit itself, as well as announcements about changes. It is anticipated that the JSC would not make changes more frequently than monthly with announcements on the JSC Website, in the RDA Toolkit, and through the RDA-L listserv which can then be transmitted to other online lists.

12. According to your opinion, what is the real strength of RDA?

**Tillett:** RDA positions us for a future where library data takes on a greater role for helping users. Our data can be re-used in many environments to enrich the information seeking experience of our users, doing such things as automatically capturing data for bibliographies for research (as was been prototyped with RedLightGreen and other experiments), for packaging our data in visualizations that better tell the story about people associated with publications (as we have demonstrated with VIAF), for enabling people worldwide to access the rich resources of libraries, including digital/digitized resources. I believe without making a radical change in how we do the business of cataloging, libraries will be by-passed by the Web environment, when in fact, we should be leading the information community to better organize that environment to benefit the people of the entire world. RDA can help us make that transition and provide a solid foundation for the future.

Dr. Tillett, thank you for answering our questions.