Trends in Source of Catalog Records for European Monographs 1996–2000

A Preliminary Study of Italian Monographs

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Minimal-level catalog records created by European booksellers for non-English language books are being loaded into OCLC. These vendor records lack Library of Congress (LC) call numbers and subject headings, and their names and series do not necessarily conform to the U.S. authority file, therefore they require upgrading by original catalogers. A preliminary study of Italian language monographs was done at a large research university library to discover the prevalence of these vendor records compared with records created by LC and OCLC member libraries. It was found that over the period 1996–2000 there has been a drastic decline in the number of original member records for Italian books and a corresponding increase in vendor records, which then must be upgraded by member libraries. The implications of this finding include changes in cataloging-department workflow and a decrease in national-level cooperative cataloging, depending on the extent to which libraries export unmodified vendor records and edit them in-house.

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M inimal-level catalog records created by European booksellers for non-English language books have been loaded in increasing numbers into the OCLC database since 1997. Concern about the quality of these vendor records and their effect on cataloging departments has been expressed in several venues including the inaugural meeting of a new cataloging discussion group under the auspices of the Western European Specialists Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia in January 1999. Many libraries have separate workflows for books for which a catalog record already exists in a national database ("copy") versus books which need an original record created. Records appearing in the copy cataloging workflow that need extra work cause interruptions and delays in the workflow. Many libraries also do not have the authority to modify an existing record in OCLC but are allowed to contribute new records. If there are many more minimal records already in the database, they are then precluded from contributing to the national cooperative cataloging effort or are forced to contribute a duplicate record.

Minimal-level records contributed by book vendors are useful to acquisitions departments, since they include title, publisher and ISBN, making automated ordering with an attached order record easier. For catalogers, vendor minimal-level records are more problematic. They do not contain call numbers or subject headings, and the author names and series do not necessarily conform to the U.S. authority file maintained by the Library of Congress (LC) and contributing Name Authority Cooperative (NACO) libraries. For example, Casalini Libri usually includes all known parts of a name and dates in name headings. The name may have been established in the U.S. authority file without this information, so the bibliographic record needs to conform to that established form when included in U.S. catalogs. This problem is especially prevalent in the field of Classics, where many well-known Greek and Latin authors were established under the English form of their last name alone. Examples include Plutarch (instead of the Greek Ploutarchos or Latin Plutarchus) and Ovid (instead of Ovidius Naso, Publius). While the wisdom of this practice may be questioned in retrospect, especially in light of the growing globalization of information access, the fact remains that new records coming into the catalog must be consistent with the already established forms of the names and series.

Large numbers of minimal-level records needing enhancement by catalogers appearing in the bibliographic utilities may affect the workflow and costs of cataloging in libraries that acquire many European language monographs. An advantage of vendor records is that they relieve catalogers of some of the bibliographic data entry that would be necessary if completely original records had to be created. OCLC also allows a larger credit to contributing libraries for upgrading records to Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) level than for providing entirely new records, if a library has that authorization. Conversely, a disadvantage is that unless the records are checked carefully for conformance to AACR2 standards for bibliographic description and compatibility of names, series, and uniform titles with the established forms before the records are added to a local catalog, inconsistencies may develop in the catalog that would be confusing to patrons and costly to correct.

In order to discover how prevalent these vendor records are becoming, a limited study of the source of catalog records for Italian monographs in the field of Classics, acquired over the last five years, was undertaken using the online catalog of the University of Colorado, Boulder (UCB) libraries. Italian-language monographs were selected because the Italian vendor, Casalini Libri, has been contributing records to OCLC since 1997, allowing a trend to be observed over time. The field of Classics was chosen because it is of a manageable size with a reasonable proportion of Italian language monographs purchased each year.

Literature Review

Only two major reports of research concerning the cataloging of foreign language materials have appeared in the library literature within the last ten years. Da Conturbia (1992) reported results of a survey of heads of cataloging of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members on backlogs of foreign-language materials and foreign-language capabilities of catalogers in those libraries. One limitation that she discovered was the unavailability of separate cataloging statistics for foreign language materials, either maintained manually or available from computerized catalogs, so participants were asked to provide estimates. Of the 80 libraries responding, 32.5% reported a foreign-language cataloging backlog of over 5,000 items, 21.3% had a backlog of less than 500 items, with the rest falling in between. Another finding of da Conturbia's study was that increased foreign-language material acquisitions (22.50%) and insufficient staffing (36.25%) were the most prominent reasons for the existence of cataloging backlogs of these materials. These circumstances led 18.75% ($n=15$) of responding libraries to begin using minimal-level cataloging and another 18.75% to consider using it. It may be that the appearance of minimal-level vendor records has been beneficial in alleviating foreign-language backlogs, if roughly 37% of surveyed ARL libraries were already using minimal-level records or considering it. The study was done before OCLC began loading vendor records into the database, however. Some member-contributed minimal-level records include a call number and subject headings (although they are optional) and use the authorized forms of names and series, whereas the vendor records never include a call number or subject headings, and forms of names and series have not been checked. A follow-up study of ARL libraries on their current use of minimal-level records would be useful, in light of these differences.

Leazer and Rohdy (1995) reviewed previous studies and conducted a study of their own in 1993 to ascertain the level of bibliographic control over foreign monographs. Although there were problems of differing methodologies in the studies reviewed, they concluded that the studies showed that approximately three-quarters (75%) of the cataloging records for general samples of books acquired in the libraries in the studies came from LC while only a mean of 48% of records for foreign publications came from LC. One drawback to this comparison is that some of the studies, including that of the authors, included foreign monographs in their general samples of all acquisitions. While this may be useful for determining the overall availability of LC records for a library's acquisitions, it would also be useful to know what differences exist in availability of LC records for English-language books versus books in other languages. Language, rather than country of publication, is the greatest hurdle in cataloging foreign monographs, espe-

cially in determining subject content in order to assign subject headings and a call number.

Leazer and Rohdy conclude that American libraries are failing to provide complete access to foreign-published research materials. Their data do show that even after searching OCLC again one year after the initial search, there were records for only 77.9% of foreign publications in their sample versus records for 99% of U.S. publications (1995, 40). Their data also show, however, that the percentages of full-level records found were actually slightly higher for foreign publication (86.3% versus 84.2% for U.S. publications) (40). They do not say what was done with books for which no record was found in OCLC after a year, but this is a significant issue. Before 1997, a library could either wait for a record to appear in their cataloging utility or they could provide an original record. With the advent of vendor records into the utilities, the initial hit rate of finding a record has probably improved, but if access points are missing and fewer libraries choose to upgrade the records, access may be deteriorating rather than improving. A comparative study of the cataloging practices of libraries collecting a large number of foreign publications would draw a clearer picture of the current state of access to foreign publications.

Beall (2000) recently introduced to the literature the question of the impact of vendor records on cataloging of foreign publications. He notes that the role that OCLC is filling in the library world has changed from an exclusive concern with quality cooperative cataloging to a goal of serving a wider constituency of library patrons, booksellers, and acquisitions departments. He demonstrates the low quality of the vendor records with examples and points out that minimal-level records contributed by member libraries "have a much higher likelihood" of using the authorized form for names, series, and subjects (when present) than do vendor records, although no substantiating data is available (232).

Many catalogers would agree with Beall's correspondents that the amount of intellectual work required to upgrade vendor records is nearly equivalent to that of doing an original record. The problem is that the existence of these records in OCLC as "copy" means that they are routed to copy catalogers rather than to original catalogers. Beall reports that the procedures of some libraries make it time-consuming to separate minimal-level vendor records from other copy since there is no code or easily identified marker to distinguish them from other minimal-level records. OCLC procedures also may make it more difficult and more expensive (depending on the library's contract with OCLC and whether they may enhance records online) to upgrade an existing record than to contribute an original one.

The present study is a preliminary attempt to supply some quantitative data on the prevalence of minimal-level vendor records as a source of cataloging for European language books. Specifically, this study documents the numbers of records from a vendor versus the number of original member records and LC records available from OCLC for Italian language books over a period of five years, from 1996 through 2000. It is retrospective and therefore studies records already in the catalog rather than hit rates for new acquisitions, so by definition, a bibliographic record exists for all the books. The records are also all full level since the UCB Libraries' catalog department has a policy of upgrading minimal-level records to full level or PCC level, but it is possible to tell from the MARC 040 field in the record how many records had to be entered originally or were upgraded. The present study was done with a computerized catalog (Innovative Interfaces) that does provide the capability for compiling statistics by language of the material and date cataloged, allowing for more accurate data than was possible in da Conturbia's study. The cataloging source for English-language books in the same subject will also be examined as a point of comparison.

Method

The list-making capability of the Innovative Interfaces catalog was used to compile a list of all records with language equal to Italian, in the call number range PA1–PA9999 with a cataloging date between 1/1/1996 and 12/31/2000. The list was then sorted by cataloging date so that the data could be separated by year. The cataloging source field (MARC tag 040) was included in the data printed out and the library codes in that field were used to manually count how many records were created by LC, member libraries (including UCB), and Casalini Libri. For comparison, an equivalent list with language equal to English was also created.

Results

The replacement of records for Italian monographs contributed to OCLC by member libraries with records created by a vendor and then upgraded is clearly demonstrated by the table 1 data. Records contributed by LC show a modest increase over the period studied, from a low of 24% to more than 30% in 1998–2000. Member-contributed records, however, declined drastically from a high of 76% in 1996 (the year before vendor records began to appear) to a low of 10% in 2000. Conversely, vendor records have increased steadily to 60% of records for Italian monographs in 2000. By contrast, for English-language books in the same field, the number of records created by LC has risen from 50% of the total in 1996 to 80% in 2000, while the number of member records has declined from 50% to 16% (table 2). Four records for English books from the German vendor Harassowitz were found in both 1999 and 2000.

Discussion

The number of records in this study is relatively small, since this was a preliminary investigation, so the percentages should not be seen as fixed numbers. The trend, however, was so striking that it seemed useful to report on it to the technical services community while further data is being collected on monographs in other languages and subject areas.

The total number of Italian books cataloged annually remained fairly constant over the study period, but the total number of English books has declined quite a bit, which raises collection development questions, since the budget for Classics monographs remained the same during this period. Further data collection in other subject areas will be useful in order to confirm the increase in the percentage of LC cataloging for English language books. The high total numbers for both English and Italian books in 1996 probably represents catch-up cataloging, since the new automated system was installed at UCB in 1995.

Conclusions

The data collected in this study has confirmed the impression that a rapid and large-scale replacement of original records contributed by member libraries with minimal-level vendor records has occurred for at least one European language and subject area. Data for French, German, and Spanish books in other subjects such as history, literature, and science is being collected by the author in order to con-

Table 1. Records for Italian books in PA Class

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
LC	27 (24%)	15 (23%)	22 (36%)	29 (38%)	22 (30%)
Member	87 (76%)	32 (50%)	15 (25%)	15 (20%)	7 (10%)
Vendor	0	17 (27%)	24 (39%)	32 (42%)	44 (60%)
Total	114 (100%)	64 (100%)	61 (100%)	76 (100%)	73 (100%)

Note: Percentages have been rounded off. Numbers in each column represent the source that first input the record into OCLC. All vendor records were upgraded by member libraries or UCB before inclusion in the UCB catalog.

Table 2. Records for English books in PA Class

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
LC	152 (50.3%)	165 (64%)	114 (79%)	117 (74%)	88 (80%)
Member	150 (49.7%)	93 (36%)	30 (21%)	38 (24%)	18 (16%)
Vendor	0	0	0	4 (2%)	4 (4%)
Total	302 (100%)	258 (100%)	144 (100%)	159 (100%)	110 (100%)

Note: Percentages have been rounded off.

firm the trend. The reporting of this trend towards vendor records appearing in OCLC is in no way intended as a disparagement of the Casalini Libri firm, whose excellent work of gaining bibliographic control over the output of Italian publishers has provided a great service to research libraries worldwide (Casalini 1995). The usefulness of even brief records for ordering purposes seems indisputable.

The usefulness of these records for WorldCat patrons is more problematic, given their lack of access points, but it seems unlikely that OCLC will discontinue loading vendor records. Given these realities, the new questions become: how are library cataloging departments handling vendor records, how many libraries upgrade the records in OCLC or RLIN, how many download them as they appear, and what modifications do they make in-house? A recent small study of vendor records for Spanish books by Shedenhelm and Burk (2001) found that full-level records were available for 81.25% of the titles by the end of one year and for 95.31% by the end of two years. It would be interesting to know how many libraries are contributing those full-level records or upgrades and what other libraries do with the titles until full-level copy appears.

The trend reported in this study underscores the need for a dialogue among catalogers in academic and research libraries, as called for by Beall (2000, 237), about upgrading records for foreign publications so that the benefits of cooperative cataloging do not slip away. Discussions with OCLC and RLIN also might lead to beneficial changes such as a different cataloging-level code for vendor records so that they could more easily be separated from other minimal-level records. Further research to provide some answers to the questions outlined above is needed, as are efforts at the national conferences to begin a dialog among catalogers on the current state of cooperative cataloging and the economic and technical disincentives working against it.

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