

## **E-ventures: Notes and Reflections from the E-serials Field**

Mary Curran, Editor

### **Defining the Boundaries: FRBR, AACR and the Serial**

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## Defining the Boundaries: FRBR, AACR and the Serial

Suddenly it's everywhere, in conference sessions, publications, excited discussions. Issued in 1998 in final form, the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*<sup>1</sup> (FRBR) has in recent years attracted increasing interest in the AACR cataloguing community. Are we undergoing a paradigm-shift? How will this apply to serials?

To briefly summarize, FRBR is an entity-relationship model of the bibliographic record. The three groups of entities, each with their corresponding attributes and the relationships between them form the core of the model. The group 1 entities (work, expression, manifestation, item) are the focus of the bibliographic record. The group 2 entities (person, corporate body) stand in responsibility relationships to the group 1 entities. The group 3 entities (concept, object, event, place), along with any group 1 or 2 entity, stand in subject relationships to group 1 entities.

The novelty of the model is in the definition and interrelationships of the group 1 entities:

<work> is realized through <expression> is embodied in <manifestation> is exemplified by <item>

The definitions of the group 1 entities can be extracted from FRBR (section 3.2) as follows:

**Work.** A distinct intellectual or artistic creation.

**Expression.** The intellectual or artistic realisation of a work in the form of alpha-numeric, musical or choreographic notation, sound, image, object, movement, etc., or any combination of such forms.

**Manifestation.** The physical embodiment of an expression of a work.

**Item.** A single exemplar of a manifestation.

Within the framework of the model, these four bibliographic entities are interrelated, each definition depending on the others for meaning. It is important to view these entities together as they function as a whole.

As pointed out in the charge of the CONSER Task Group on FRBR and Continuing Resources<sup>2</sup> (formed May 2002), serials are not the classic examples usually taken to illustrate FRBR. Non-serial literature and music examples are the most frequently given, so let's take a look at a general serial in FRBR form:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| work           | - the underlying serial as a whole              |
| expressions    | - text in original language                     |
|                | - translation of the text into another language |
|                | - audio version for the hearing-impaired        |
| manifestations | - original print                                |
|                | - reprint in print                              |
|                | - microfilm reproduction                        |
|                | - CD-ROM  |
|                | - remote e-versions such as in pdf files        |
| items          | - each subscription/copy held                   |

Serials do not usually have many expressions: versions where the essential content is the same but the mode of expression is different. In a translation, the content is given in a different language; in an audio version, a different sense is used to perceive the content, but the intellectual content remains essentially the same. These types of expressions are clearly identifiable. An expression may have additional persons or bodies responsible for that expression that are not responsible for the work as a whole, for instance translator(s), reader(s) and new issuing bodies.

Each expression will have one or more manifestations associated with it. As it is often interesting to discuss as a group those manifestations associated with the same expression of the work, the Format Variation Working Group coined the term expression set in its October 2001 first *Interim Report* to JSC<sup>3</sup>. The manifestations in an expression set are more closely related to each other than they are to manifestations of any other expression, because they share exact wording and structure as well as

intellectual content, differing in appearance and physical carrier only. A manifestation may have additional persons or bodies responsible for the publication or manufacture of that manifestation but not of the whole work or expression.

Making each manifestation of the serial available for purchase by distributing it in multiple items is the whole point of commercially distributed serials. As the word item has been used in so many senses in different contexts, it is important to keep in mind that the FRBR item is the whole run, copy or subscription of a serial as held, regardless of how many physical or bibliographic volumes, numbers, issues, parts, or fascicles it is distributed in. (This is quite distinct from the sense of item in the MARC21 Holdings format, where the Item Information fields (87x) give information about each physical piece at the inventory level.) An item may have unique physical characteristics such as binding. Holdings statements are an attribute at the item level, while the publication pattern is an attribute at the expression level.

Although the group 1 entities are usually illustrated from the top down, when working with real bibliographic data they are built from the bottom up by a process of abstraction. The entity work always represents a process of abstraction of the essential unity of expressions, which are in turn abstracted from the tangible manifestations. In turn, manifestations are built up from the items we actually hold through our expectations of the publishing world.

One reason that serials are not usually seen as convenient for illustrating FRBR is that they are aggregate works. Each serial is composed of smaller independent works which can happily take on lives of their own when being reprinted, anthologized, issued in expanded or abridged forms. This does not prevent the serial as a whole from being a work; the selection and arrangement of the components is a form of intellectual or artistic creation in its own right.

What is the boundary of work for a serial? When is something a distinct intellectual or artistic creation?

The answer to this question is culture-bound. We can find an answer by looking within our own cataloguing practices which themselves reflect our scholarly and bibliographic tradition. In AACR, the choice of main entry heading is our primary signal (even if imperfect) of our cultural interpretation of work boundaries. When seen as the citation for a distinct work, the full main entry heading, which may consist of a name/title, name/uniform title, uniform title or title proper construct, serves to identify the work in all its forms. All bibliographic records entered under the same main entry are collocated in the catalogue and thus distinguished from records entered under another main entry. In AACR2 most serials are given a title main entry, thus a title change that requires a new record requires a new main entry, which in turn implies that we are treating them as distinct works. We divide serial successive titles into multiple works by default, as it were, as explained in Delsey (2003)<sup>4</sup>

In a sense any division point of the continuum is arbitrary. The aggregate nature of serials means that each of their component parts is fairly self-contained. Why do we ever feel the need to divide anyway? The need is clear enough for those serials that split, merge or drastically reorient their scope, but the natural accumulation of smaller changes in long-lived serials can mean that readers of recent volumes would hardly recognize the earliest volumes as belonging to the same publication. Keeping too much together may not be helpful to users, if they cannot recognize the bibliographic record as matching the citation they are seeking. Splitting too often (apart from making unnecessary work for cataloguers) might also make locating the record corresponding to a citation difficult for users. Through various revisions to AACR2 we have adjusted our decision-making criteria to improve the balance between these opposing concerns, the intention being to provide a basis for making a judgement about which changes have broken the continuity enough to draw a boundary. It is these criteria that define for us the boundary of a serial work.

Deciding to record a separate work does not mean losing sight of its relationships to other works, some of which can be very close. FRBR provides us with a taxonomy of relationships between group 1 entities; the work-to-work relationships (table 5.1, section 5.3.1) are particularly relevant here. The first given is

the successor relationship, which gives us the two-way relationship between succeeding works. This has a clear application to serial succeeding works defined by title changes. The chain of succeeding serials, along with other close relationships at the work level, lead to a web of relationships expressed within the catalogue. These have frequently been described as a serial family. There is no cut and dried line or circle around any cluster, no top entity or superwork in the FRBR model; the works and the relationship-based clusters they form capture everything.

In approaching the cataloguing of electronic serials of all sorts, we strive to continue the practice of catalogue integration: integrating records for all types of materials in the same database, integration of rules and standards for all types of materials into the same framework. This continuity of principles applied to different types of materials is what makes it feasible to provide access to all forms of materials using one database and one interface.

Have we always respected this continuity in our practices for e-serials? One doubtful area is the use of the uniform title qualifier **(Online)** to distinguish the paper manifestation from the electronic one. The rest of AACR practice equates a distinct main entry with a new work needing to be distinguished from any other work. Here we provide a distinct main entry in a case where we are sure that we are dealing with the same work, only a new expression or manifestation of it as the case may be.

Attending the SCCTP Electronic Serials Cataloguing Workshop recently led me to thinking about how some e-serials cataloguing practices can be understood when considered in light of FRBR. In no particular order, here are issues that seemed interesting:

- Discussion of the scope of application for the technique of reproduction cataloguing leads to the difficulty of being sure that an electronic version is truly a reproduction of a print original. Is it clearly a digitization of existing print? Considering how computerized the means of production are, is there even an original? Casting this criterion in terms of FRBR, a manifestation can only be treated as a reproduction

(electronic or microform or print) if it is part of the same expression set as the original manifestation. As soon as there are significant differences in the mode of expression, we do not have a reproduction. The reproduction relationship also requires some priority in time for the original, enough that it can form the basis of the reproduction.

- Simultaneous publications, whether in alternate format or just alternate issuance, while not within the reproduction relationship, are still within the same expression set. FRBR gives two types of relationships that can hold between manifestations of the same expression: reproduction and alternate. Alternate includes alternate format (different carrier), or simultaneously released editions. As reproduction is a narrower concept than expression set, there is no need to see all members of an expression set in terms of reproduction.

- In the separate record approach, using fields 530/776 to link the print and online records can be seen as recording a relationship at the manifestation-level, between members of a single expression set.

- In the CONSER single-record approach, a record is created based on the print manifestation, which includes a delineation of the online version with a pointer to that version. Normally records are prepared based on a chief source; it is clearly tricky to prepare an original record based on the print if you do not have any print issues and the online version you actually have access to is not obviously a digitization of the print. This type of record is carefully distinguished from a multiple versions record and with good reason. The latter would be a record based at a higher level than the manifestation; that would require both a much greater degree of abstraction from the chief sources, and some mechanism to give clear information about which manifestations (versions) are being covered. Inherent difficulties with highly abstract records include: Will users recognize them as matching their citations? How to prepare them unless you have access to all the chief sources of all the relevant versions? How much maintenance to require when new versions are issued? But the biggest question of all is: How far to abstract? In FRBR terms: Is the record intended to cover a whole expression set, or only that subset related by reproduction

(which does not have a formal name in the model)?

- Even when following the single-record approach, separate records are made when there are significant differences between the print and the online versions. Considered within the FRBR framework, this criterion can be seen as requiring separate records whenever the print and the online are actually manifestations of different expressions of the underlying work.

- Certain e-serials do not retain the issue structure of the print version. As sequencing pattern, regularity and frequency are attributes at the expression-level, should such e-serials always be seen as different expressions of the underlying work?

- The change of print to online issuance is treated as a major change, and as such requires a new record, this time with a different main entry, a qualified uniform title. Considered in the FRBR framework the implication of this treatment is that we see this as a new succeeding work.

The process of integrating new forms of materials into cataloguing practice is a perfect opportunity to examine the principles behind the practice and refine the essential concepts through their application to something new. In addition, the structure provided by the FRBR model allows us to view AACR practices in a new light. The result is a principled basis for ongoing rule revision.

#### Notes

1. IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records. *Functional requirements for bibliographic record : final report*. Munchen : K.G. Saur, 1998. (UBCIM Publications. New Series ; 19)
2. CONSER Task Group on FRBR and Continuing Resources. (last update May 23, 2002)  
<http://www.loc.gov/acq/conser/fibrcharge.html> (viewed on March 23, 2003).
3. Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of AACR. Format Variation Working Group. *Interim*



*Report, October 8, 2001.* <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/jsc/current.html#ForVarWG> (viewed on March 23, 2003).

4. Tom Delsey. *FRBR and Serials*. January 15, 2003. (available at:  
<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/wgfrbr/papers.htm>) (viewed on March 23, 2003).