

## Changing the Organization for Cataloguing in the BnF: a Long-term Project

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The Science and Technology department which I am in charge of is one of the departments which is responsible for acquisitions, reader access and conservation of documents, unlike that of the Legal deposit department, which is responsible for the administration and the cataloguing of legal deposit material.

Therefore, my point of view is not from a purely bibliographic department but from an „access to collections” department, where the main goal is to put collections at the reader’s disposal as fast as possible.

### INTRODUCTION: HISTORY

For several centuries the French national library has been responsible for cataloguing the cultural heritage collections, acquired through legal deposit, exchanges, gifts and acquisitions. It has also been responsible for establishing the French national bibliography.

The merger (1994) with the new *Bibliothèque de France*, described by the late President Mitterand in 1988 as „a vast library of an entirely new type ... accessible to one and all” put forward two other objectives: greatly increase access to much enlarged collections in the reading rooms and make encyclopaedic collections of a reference library available to the general public rather than just researchers.

These two different missions led to two different cataloguing processes, at least for the cataloguing of printed books and periodicals, another department being in charge of audiovisual and electronic publications:

- one for legal deposit, which catalogues all French language publications. This is the mission of the legal deposit department.
- one for acquisitions, which catalogues foreign language materials selected by the collections departments. This represents a second cataloguing process with slightly different objectives.

It is important to notice that these two cataloguing processes have about the same number of monographs to catalogue.

## 1. DIFFERENT CATALOGUING PROCESSES

### 1.1 *Legal Deposit.*

Speaking only of the printed materials, more than 63,000 bibliographical records (corresponding to many more physical units) were published in the *Bibliographie nationale française* in the year 2000 (latest available figures), including about 52,000 records for books and 6,300 records for serial publications, the rest comprising music scores, maps and atlases.

### 1.2 *Acquisitions*

The new objectives of the library meant new cataloguing issues relating to the number and access of materials. Beginning in 1990, the year in which the *Bibliothèque de France* started acquisitions for the new reading rooms, it represented and it still represents a huge amount of new documents to catalogue. In May 2001 (latest available figures), there were about 267,000 items in the upper level reading rooms, for the general public, and 300,000 in the lower level reading rooms, for researchers.

Foreign language materials of the open access collections comprise 45 % of the materials in the general public reading rooms and more than 70 % in the research reading rooms. Added to this, we have to acquire foreign language materials to complete collections kept in the stacks. This represents to day about half of the acquisitions in some collection departments.

The Bibliothèque de France first called on a specialized company to do this cataloguing, then in 1994 when the departments of the new library were created they all included their own cataloguing sections, as it is the case today.

These sections are composed of technical staff, with different specialties corresponding to subjects of the collections, and coordinators to establish the authority records (authors and subjects), to supervise and to validate the records. Acquisition staff collaborate closely with cataloguers to select materials which have to be catalogued first, as there is in fact a constant backlog which we have difficulty clearing. Acquisition staff also collaborate with cataloguers to establish indexing and call numbers for open access material.

One of our biggest problems is that the library has to face a significant and continuous staff turn-over, mainly because staff appointed to the BnF after

nationally organized examinations wish to return as soon as possible to their inhome region.

There is also an inter-departmental coordinating committee, headed by the collections management, to maintain the consistency of the cataloguing in the different departments and to ensure that guidelines are applied.

To regulate the cataloguing in the whole library, coordinate the different sections and procedures and organize training for cataloguers, there is a bibliographic coordination section which is also in charge of standardization. It also administers the authority files.

### *1.3 Old and Rare Books*

I have to mention a third cataloguing process which relates to old or rare books. As you know, the peculiarities of each copy have to be catalogued in accordance with special rules. The *Inventory* section and the *Reserve* department are in charge of this particular cataloguing process.

## 2. GOALS OF THE COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENTS: NEW ISSUES

As I said earlier, requirements and objectives of the collections departments are slightly different from those of the legal deposit cataloguing process.

### *First: National Bibliography versus Catalogue*

The production of the two processes are different. On the basis of materials acquired through legal deposit the first mission of the BnF is to produce the French National Bibliography. This is an international obligation. Different commercial publications are produced which are mainly used by professionals in France and abroad. Whereas the main objective of the acquisition departments is to constitute the catalogue to enable users to retrieve materials they need. Of course records for materials in French, which are catalogued for the bibliographical publications, are included in the same catalogue as foreign language material. Yet the bibliographical and catalogue requirements are slightly different.

### *Second: Responsibility of the French National Library for French Materials versus Foreign Language Materials*

Different types of material may be catalogued differently, in terms of comprehensiveness of the bibliographic description and of the authority files. The

BnF is the reference library for French cataloguing while reference records for foreign language materials can be found in foreign sources.

*Third: Need for Quality First versus Need for Faster Reader Access to Materials*

The main objective of acquisition departments is again to make open access material available to users as fast as possible (above all in science subjects). Even if these materials have not been catalogued perfectly they can be retrieved in the reading rooms directly from the shelves, thanks to the subject classification. Thus the quality of the call number is as important as the quality of the bibliographic description.

*Fourth: to Train Staff and Improve Their Skills in the Cataloguing of French Materials versus Requirements for Foreign Language Materials*

The priorities differ. For example the legal deposit department has to catalogue applying the standard for full records for all kind of materials whereas on the other hand in acquisition departments we first have to know how to use external sources to retrieve foreign language records. Another priority is to increase our knowledge of subject indexing for subjects which may be very specialized whereas we establish author authority records just to avoid double entries in the catalogue.

These needs are not contradictory but one can be given emphasis differently than another. Of course the staff has to be trained to use the same bibliographic and authority formats and the same processing system. Of course the quality of the bibliographic description of foreign language materials has to be as good as possible, of course all the records appear in the same catalogue and are linked to the same authority files, of course many libraries in France use the BnF records whatever the language of materials. However the main goal of each cataloguing process may differ, above all when there are difficulties, such as lack of staff or when there is a large backlog of materials. This is of course inevitable!

Collection departments staff also have to do many other activities including front line service in the reading rooms. This has important implications, because they are not strictly specialized in cataloguing, unlike most cataloguers. On the one hand, doing front line service helps them to understand user needs and staff appreciate the diversity of tasks. On the other hand, this necessary diversity affects productivity.

Lastly, diversity of tasks makes cataloguing follow-up and use of indicators very difficult.

### 3. HOW WE MANAGE

Data retrieval from large bibliographic databases (OCLC, RLIN) is greatly encouraged. It varies on usefulness depending on the subject. In the science and technology department last year more than a third of the records we catalogued were retrieved from the OCLC data base. Subject indexing has to be translated into French. However we still save a lot of time.

I have to say that some of our cataloguers are still reluctant to use this possibility. They like cataloguing and sometimes think that the records they produce themselves are more complete than those they find in external sources. From time to time we have to remind staff of the goals of the department and stress the need for speed.

Reviewing cataloguing has been significantly reduced, and there is less checking of records by supervisors, more autonomy given to the cataloguers, after training. Now, we only check the cataloguing of new staff until they have gained some experience and we let experienced cataloguers enter their records in the catalogue directly.

Coordinators who are responsible for the author authority entries are requested to do less research for authority records concerning foreign language authors.

To reduce the backlog while dealing with current acquisitions, different measures were taken in the year 2000 to simplify the bibliographic cataloguing:

- all materials published after 1988 could be catalogued using the official medium level French standard (Z 44-073) instead of the full one (Z 44-050)
- basic standard (Z 44-072) is to be used to clear the backlog, including some gifts or exchanges prior to 1988 and books whose language is rare in France.

The necessity to get open access material onto the shelves in the reading rooms as fast as possible, which is key in science subjects, led my department to decide 3 years ago to produce brief records for certain kinds of materials: editions which are frequently updated, textbooks, science reference works with a short life span, and so on. These brief records mean a minimal bibliographic description with simplified access points: a single, but complete, subject heading (RAMEAU authority file) and the first author from the title page when there are several ones. This is not a permanent measure and we intend to complete these records when we have enough staff. About 23 % of the titles we catalogued last year were catalogued that way.

As a general guideline, cataloguers are now requested to use medium rather than maximum level application of the bibliographic standards. When

there are different options to establish a bibliographic field they have to choose the simplest.

Concerning subject indexing, they have to establish complete headings and sub-headings but limited to essential subjects.

Lastly, we decided to call on external resources. First in 2001 we called on a service provider to catalogue the backlog but the productivity was not so good as we expected. Very often we had almost as much work preparing materials to be catalogued and correcting records as to catalogue them ourselves. Therefore, we gave up this solution.

What we do now is to hire short-term qualified staff, directly supervised by the full-time staff.

#### CONCLUSION: PRESENT MANAGEMENT PROJECT

It is an on going program: an inter-departmental committee has been working since the beginning of the year to review the overall cataloguing processes and the specific roles of the different sections within the library.

It is recognized that there are mainly two different cataloguing processes within the library, which are distinct but equally important: legal deposit materials are to be catalogued with the best possible quality and as exhaustively as possible while other materials are acquired selectively and have to meet user needs within the library first. The catalogue of the library has to be as consistent as possible taking into consideration the staff and budget resources of the library.

The level, that is to say the quality control, of the bibliographic description, of authority records and indexing depend on these objectives, as do the training and the choice of tools to use.

The first result of this review is the decision to set up a new common tool by the end of 2002: a catalogue committee which will be responsible for all cataloguing-related decisions. It will also have to propose resource requirements to the general management of the library.

The national bibliographic agency will head the committee but each cataloguing process will be represented: legal deposit, acquisitions and early books.

Concerning technical issues, decisions will be taken after working parties have investigated, taking into consideration the different cataloguing processes. These issues are consistency and quality, correction priorities, applying rules and standards, new data media, etc.

To conclude, coordination and streamlining are the main objectives of this new organization. It implies redefining coordination tasks within the different sections of the library and highlighting the work of cataloguing.