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Some Remarks on the MONOCLE Format in Relation to the MARC II Format

The original development of the MARC II format by the Library of Congress and the British National Bibliography was a first attempt to provide within a machine structure that was sufficiently flexible to hold bibliographic data an implementation that defined individual data elements in the record. The format was a considerable advance on the simple and inflexible structures that had previously been developed. It offered a comprehensive tagging system with the possibility of expansion by adding completely new data fields and further precision in the specification of existing fields. The indicator positions placed at the beginning of each field, were available as information carriers and the subfields could be further extended as proved necessary. The original MARC II implementation defined by the Library of Congress was good but in many respects it was linked to Library of Congress cataloguing practice and processing requirements and much further study is necessary before the format can be used in European library systems. This has been demonstrated by developments at the British National Bibliography where very extensive use is made of the MARC record and where, as a result, a more precise implementation has been found necessary.

If the format is matched against the full bibliographic requirements of large catalogues very detailed filing information is required. This problem is particularly acute in the organisation of entries under voluminous authors, particularly classical authors. Specific filing information must be carried in the machine record itself. The degree of organisation required in the catalogue cannot be determined as so often happens in normal filing by the amount of material found under a particular heading. It must be determined at the input stage. Modifications at a later stage are sometimes impossible and always expensive.

Existing filing practice in large libraries is frequently very complex and where these practices are accepted in a national requirement the national MARC implementation must make the necessary distinctions. Entries under forename for example are frequently 'classified' by rank or by some other arbitrary characteristic making it necessary to distinguish between epithets such as 'Saint', 'Pope', 'King'. These distinctions should be made in the communication format.

The BNB MARC Office has already studied some of these difficult filing problems and has made some progress.

But this is not enough. Starting from the experiments already done and learning from the experience of others, the MONOCLE format has tried to go farther and make the MARC format more complex and more flexible.
For example the indicators in field 100 (author) were not considered satisfactory for efficient computer processing since all the complex names were put under one indicator (2) and the machine had to check every character and to take special action in each case according to the type of character. If there was a blank the machine ought to know if this blank should be left or deleted, the same for the hyphen and the apostrophe. Library filing rules are frequently 'field dependent'. That is the filing value of a character might be determined by whether it occurs in an author's name or a title. An apostrophe in an author's name may be regarded as a space; in a conference name it may be ignored. These problems can only be resolved in a filing program if very specific field and subfield identification is applied to the record. In tag 100 there were not enough subfields either for retrieval purposes or for filing purposes. Some delimiters were added.

Another example is the title part of the format. The tags in the LC/BNB MARC format implementation were not in good order, since it is better to use the tag (and also the subfield codes) with a built-in filing value. So in MONOCLE they are in the logical filing sequence. That is:

240 is the collective filing title (complete work)
241 is the individual filing title (form title)
242 is the original or parallel title
243 is the translated title
244 is the romanized title
245 is the actual title

Between these titles the relations can be very complex according to the catalog that is being built up. For a small catalog of modern books the order 240 + 241 + 245 can be used.

But, for a complete national catalog or for the catalog of a university library where you have works by Shakespeare, Goethe, V. Hugo, Schiller, Pushkin, Racine, Dostoevsky, in several languages and several editions the filing order should be more complex and it is necessary to use 240 + 241 + 242 + 243 + 244 + 245 in this order with cross references from all the titles to the first one chosen as a 'filing' title.

Special signals are also needed in the title field to indicate when the written form of the title is not the filing form. Numerals are for example frequently 'spelt out' for filing purposes ('XXth century' files as 'Twentieth century'). The MONOCLE format uses an indicator signal (4) together with special delimiters.

It also seems logical that the subfield analysis used in field 100 and 200 should also be used, for clarity, in fields 400, 700, 900. That is why MONOCLE has matching fields at 440, 441, ... 445 and so on. The title field added entry is at 745 (as 245) and not 740.
This extension allows the use of the same programs for these fields, to construct added entries author plus title and to interfile them with the main entry author plus titles.

The modifications produce a more logical structure in the record. This simplifies the program specification writing.

As well as this general re-allocation of tags and subfields to add logical properties the MONOCLE format contains several new fields i.e.

- 502 Dissertation note
- 545 Title of the periodical from which the article is taken
- 270 Address of the printer

Until now, the modification and additions made have proved sufficient for the books cataloged. But it is apparent that some more improvements will have to be added in order to take care of more complex situations which do not cause problems in a small file such as a weekly bibliography but surely appear in a library catalog.

Series, complete or selected works with several titles in one book, multivolume sets with one or several authors, all these cases cannot be treated in a single straightforward manner.

The Library of Congress has included many possibilities in its format but has not used them completely. The indicators are not really used, the subfield codes have no filing value nor logical meaning.

That is why the format can be and should be freely and widely improved. This was already done by the BNB MARC in its first version and in 1972 at the end of the U.K./MARC experimental period a new version will be adopted. The BNB has recently published a preliminary draft of revisions. The MONOCLE format has taken a good step forward to make better use of the initial format. We should agree upon one of these but I realise that in certain respects the format is very dependent on the cataloguing and filing rules of each country.

In France we need, until now, to file Saints before Popes, and these before Sovereigns (which are subarranged by the name of the country). These special categories of authors are arranged before names with other filing epithets. This is because in large catalogs the strict alphabetical order is not sufficient and for many entries a systematic order is necessary (Bible, works of one author in several languages gathered under the original title of the work and then filed according the languages and the dates).

It is necessary therefore, if the exchange system is to be fully efficient, to reach agreement on some basic cataloguing and filing rules. Some countries may have rather more complex requirements than others and in these cases it may be possible for all records in the international network to carry the more detailed analysis.

There already is a working group in the IFLA concerned with the definition of a standard bibliographic description and this work is very well advanced.
The main problem is however to reach agreement on the choice and form of the headings (corporate or title) in a catalog. If we could be sure that there is only one place possible for one work in all the national bibliographies, this would be a great simplification.

Agreement on form of heading will provide a basis for agreement on filing rules. It may be necessary to offer different levels of complexity for different types of libraries.

With new international cataloguing and filing codes available it will be possible to define a single international MARC format.

For this purpose it should be advisable to pursue the work already prepared by R.M. Duchesne on the difference between U.S. and U.K. Marc II formats and data contents, including in this study the MONOCLE format and some other formats. This study will be a sound basis on which to work before reaching an international agreement.

Of course, it is always possible to translate one format into another and every library may have its own working format but the more compatible the formats are the easier and quicker the computer conversion will be. Also the conversion operation is difficult and sometimes impossible if formats have different standards of analysis.

I hope that, after many countries will have worked with their formats and felt the difficulties to use different formats coming from different countries, an international agreement will be reached.


3) Chauveinc, Marc. —MONOCLE, an adaptation in French of the MARC II format. (J. Lib. Aut., Sept. 1971.)