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# Super records

## An approach towards the description of works appearing in various manifestations

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### Introduction

While library catalogues remained isolated and served only their local users (i.e., they were maintained at a local level), they could describe bibliographic entities on any basis they considered appropriate. On the other hand, where more than one catalogue is involved (for example, in the case of shared cataloguing systems and union catalogues) and also where catalogues are increasingly becoming a part of the global online environment, as a first principle there must be consensus regarding the basis for the description of bibliographic entities. The basis for description should fulfil the various functions of the catalogue.

### Functions of the catalogue

Most cataloguing principles, such as the basis for description, the structure of the catalogue and the choice and form of headings are, to a great extent, influenced by the objectives and functions of the catalogue. The functions of the catalogue, which were proposed by Lubetzky to, and internationally agreed on at, the Paris Conference, have their origin in the work of Panizzi and Cutter dating from the nineteenth century. According to the Statement of Principles[1, pp. 91-2], functions of the catalogue are:

#### 2. *Functions of the catalogue*

The catalogue should be an efficient instrument for ascertaining

2. 1 Whether the library contains a particular book specified by
  - (a) its author and title, or
  - (b) if the author is not named in the book, its title alone, or
  - (c) if the author and title are inappropriate or insufficient for identification, a suitable substitute for the title; and
2. 2
  - (a) which works by a particular author, and
  - (b) which editions of a particular work are in the library

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The traditional approach in the Paris Principles towards the functions of the catalogue has not been able to reconcile the differences between the “finding function” and the “collocating function” of the catalogue. It is often stated that the first and second objectives are inherently in conflict, and to consider one as primary means the sacrifice of the other. While the first function (i.e., Statement 2.1) puts emphasis on the finding of specific works within a library collection, the second function (i.e., Statement 2.2) focuses on the collocation of the works of a particular author and the editions and manifestations of a particular work.

It is said that known-item author and/or title searches comprise the majority of OPAC searches[2, p. 4; 3, p. 26; 4, p. 181; 5, p. 58; 6, p. 182]; but even if the primary aim of a user were to find a known item, this could not be generalized to all users and all environments. In some collections, especially those of literature, music, history and law, it is necessary to display the various editions of a work together in an explicit and helpful order to facilitate the user’s choice.

It should be pointed out that in addition to the finding and collocating functions, catalogues help their users to identify entities and uniquely to distinguish them, to select one item over another and to locate items in the collection. These additional functions influence the way bibliographic entities are to be described. In other words, in choosing the basis for description, all functions should be taken into consideration.

### **The basis for description**

To base the description of bibliographic entities either on the “item” in hand or on the “work” has long been a controversial issue in descriptive cataloguing. It was well illustrated at the Paris Conference by the conflict between Verona’s “bibliographic unit”[7] and Lubetzky’s “literary unit”[8] concept of description. In a global electronic environment the issue now requires a new look. Hagler[9, p. 42] points out that a delineation of whether the “work” or the “publication” should take precedence in bibliographic identification is an important issue for the catalogue.

There are a number of factors which indicate the significance of both “works” and “items” and justify the need for consideration of both approaches in the description of bibliographic entities:

- As can be implied, most functions of the catalogue, particularly the finding, selecting and locating functions, relate to entities lower than the “work” in the bibliographic hierarchy. Since “work” is an abstract entity the description at its highest level does not provide physical access. Works are accessible after they are represented in editions and/or manifestations derived from those editions.
- Searchers are usually concerned with a combination of attributes from both the “work” level, such as intellectual level, topic, language and genre, and some attributes from the “item” level, such as date of publication, place and name of the publisher, the extent of the item, standard numbers, physical format, etc., which add more bibliographic

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information about the relevance of the item to their needs. Bibliographic records should therefore convey attributes from both the intellectual work and the physical object.

- Many users usually do not know ahead of time that a work may have several different editions or manifestations. The point is that the catalogue may contain more than the user may be expecting: other works or items related to the sought item.
- Users' needs vary a great deal. While some users may find any edition of a work useful, others may require a specific edition with a particular feature. There are also users who look in the catalogue for a particular manifestation of a work or a work in a particular format.
- For acquisitions, circulation, placing reservations on books and ILL (interlibrary loan) and for the purpose of importing and exporting records (for example, for cataloguing) that usually deal with specific copies of editions, the work cannot be a good means. For this reason libraries and bibliographic utilities catalogue the item rather than the work.
- Based on users' familiarity with or knowledge of books as known or seen by them, the item and the cataloguing data on the chief source of information (such as the title page) are more appropriate as the basis of description for most types of publication[10,11]. (However, the basis for the description of equivalent and near-equivalent items, such as reproductions, is a different case: reproductions, particularly in microform, can be described as notes in the records created for the original item.)

In conclusion, even if we base the description on the "item", we still need to provide an efficient means of displaying the relationship between the item described and other works. In general, consideration should be given to the notion that the items to be catalogued are not always stand-alone publications and that they may be dependent works. This requires one to identify the relationships between the items being catalogued and other items/works and to create the relevant links. This same approach helps resolve the question as to whether, for bibliographic entities, the "work" or the "item" should be the basis for description. In effect, we need to emphasize both the finding function and the collocating function of the catalogue and reiterate what Lubetzky[12, p. x] stated years ago: "The two functions are complementary, but both are essential to the effectiveness of the catalog".

### **The concept of super records**

As an example of the potential of the online environment for handling the above question the following concept is developed focusing on the needs of those libraries that consider the two functions equally important.

While it is assumed here that the basic unit of description is the item in hand and records describing items would fulfil the finding, selecting and locating functions, two kinds of "super records" can be constructed for the effective

discharge of the collocating function: one for voluminous authors containing the author heading and titles of the works by that author (see Figure 1); and one for voluminous titles which have different editions and manifestations (see Figures 2-4)[13]. The super record for authors can have a simple arrangement of works

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### **Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616.**

*Works by this author available in/through this catalogue are:*

Complete works

Selections

Individual plays:

All's well that ends well

.....

Hamlet

.....

Winter's tale

Poems

Sonnets

Lyrics

Epic poems

Other poems

Apocrypha

#### **Figure 1.**

A sample of the super record for a voluminous author

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### **Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616**

#### **Hamlet**

*This work includes the following editions/manifestations, etc., available in/through this catalogue:*

Complete texts (by date, editor, language)

Adaptations and arrangements (by type of modification)

Versions (by physical form)

#### **Figure 2.**

A sample of the super record for a classical work

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### **Arabian Nights**

*This work includes the following editions/manifestations, etc., available in/through this catalogue:*

Complete texts (by date, language)

Selections (by date, language)

Adaptations and arrangements (by type of modification)

Versions (by physical form)

#### **Figure 3.**

A sample of the super record for an anonymous work

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### **Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules**

*This work includes the following editions/manifestations available in/through this catalogue:*

Complete texts (by date, editor)

Selections

Translations (by language)

Versions (by physical form)

#### **Figure 4.**

A sample of the super record for a modern work

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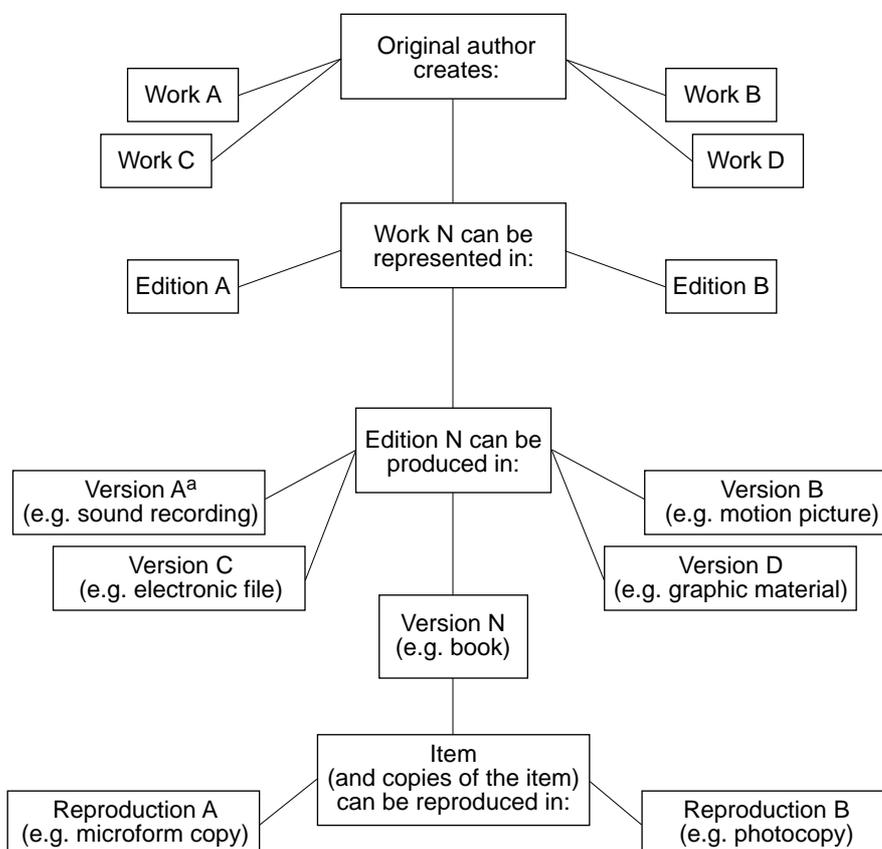
by the author (for example, alphabetical, chronological, or according to genres). It may also display different forms of the author's name under the established heading (not in the examples which follow).

The super record for a work would contain the author heading (if applicable) and the uniform title along with a categorization of different editions and manifestations, each category linked to the relevant sub-category, and sub-categories linked to actual records for items. In the super record for works, if we identify and record various applicable sub-categories, it will result in a better syndetic structure. (Owing to the need to assemble related works/items on shelves, a similar concept has partially been devised in some of the LC schedules (e.g. literature).) For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the *Arabian Nights* can have super records with the categorization for different editions and manifestations available in the collection as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Super records for works are in effect a device for incorporating the concept of "super works", i.e. the totality of a work, its different editions and manifestations and the relationships among them. Thus super records can be created and structured according to the conceptual models developed for entities in the bibliographic universe (see Figures 5 and 6 for examples of such models). The type of categorization depends on the available manifestations of the work and for each work it may be different. For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (see Figure 2) has a comprehensive category of different editions, versions, manifestations, etc., whereas the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (Figure 4) has a limited category.

It should be pointed out that since the subject approach is outside of the scope of this article, the categorizations and the examples given here do not deal with subject access to bibliographic entities. It should also be added that the categorizations here are not exhaustive but they are partial examples of the concept. In this context, the terms used for different categories of entities in the bibliographic universe may not be consistent at this stage and may differ among catalogues. Nevertheless, if it is expensive for local libraries to customize the terms in super records, there may be some sort of universal set that libraries can select from rather than having to start from the beginning each time.

Catalogue users will search and retrieve super records through author uniform headings or uniform titles or author headings/uniform titles first so that they can scan the record and decide on the type of edition or manifestation they are looking for. (This depends on the ability of the system to point to the relevant index for authors or titles first (e.g. browsable name indexes).) The reverse is also possible: once a record for an item has been retrieved in response to a specific query, the searcher can move from that record to the relevant super record through an assigned link. This bi-directional approach makes the navigation of the bibliographic universe easier and more understandable. In an electronic environment, linkage from records for items to super records can be created through the addition of relevant reference(s) or note(s) using linking



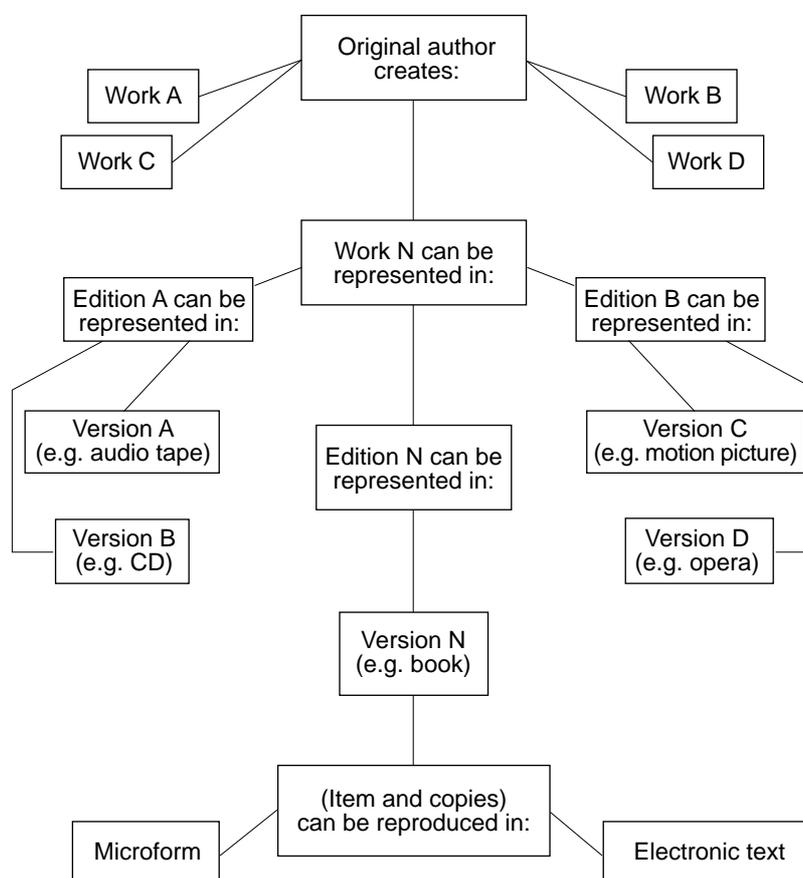
**Figure 5.**  
A conceptual model of  
bibliographic entities in  
the bibliographic  
universe (different  
versions derived from  
one particular edition)

**Note:**

<sup>a</sup> Versions do not necessarily imply that they are catalogued under the same creator

techniques for jumping to different bibliographic levels as has been demonstrated in an experiment developed for this concept. Although the technical aspects of providing such links is outside the scope of this article, the hypertext technique is feasible in the online environment and could provide such links.

As can be seen, since a uniform title approach is used as a uniform identifier and a collocating device wherever a work has more than one edition and/or manifestation in the catalogue, the concept of super records, in general, reiterates the principle of uniform titles. A browsable uniform-title index (or authority file) with the name of the author(s) of each work could provide easy access to works (the browsable index for anonymous works contains no author's name, of course). Thus uniform titles would be assigned to all works which are considered important for collocation purposes[14]. This requires that uniform titles should be subject to authority control.



**Figure 6.** A conceptual model of entities in the bibliographic universe (different versions derived from different editions)

*Functions of super records*

Conceptually, super records identify super works. Practically, they help in the better fulfilment of the collocation of different works by a particular author (Paris Principle 2.2 (a)) and also of various editions and manifestations of a particular work (Paris Principle 2.2 (b)) and display them in a more meaningful arrangement. In essence, the super record for authors can assemble different works by an author in a defined order. Similarly, the super record for works is a simple approach by which collocation of different editions and manifestations of a work can be implemented in a more flexible way.

*Advantages of super records*

In terms of bringing different editions and manifestations of a work together, the concept of super records can, in fact, be considered as a revival of an old concept (such as explanatory pages or cards) present in book catalogues, bibliographies and card catalogues. What is new here is that with the

computer's ability to organize/reorganize entries and to create dynamic links it is possible to construct catalogues demonstrating the relationships between works and their editions and manifestations in a more logical and consistent way.

In essence, with the idea of super records, catalogues resemble bibliographies in terms of their collocating function and the arrangement of entries. Super records and bibliographies can have a similar framework for bringing together related entities and displaying the types of relationships among them. In such a framework, the relationships of dependence and subordination, of similarity and difference between or among related entities would be more clearly demonstrated. Further, with super records online catalogues and bibliographies would share a similar approach in providing a partial picture of the bibliographic universe. The advantages of the integration of catalogues and bibliographies have already been highlighted and proposed by Buckland[15,16]. Super records, like bibliographies, are concerned with works and editions of works rather than with individual copies of items.

Conceptually and also from the result of the experiment done by this author on prototype super records, it can be concluded that the concept of super records has a number of advantages as follows:

- With super records in place the online catalogue would be more capable of special arrangements of entries than the current structure of catalogues (compare, for example, different bibliographies on Shakespeare with the super record created for Shakespeare in the Prototype Catalogue of Super Records constructed for this research). Super records explain complex parts of the catalogue and bring together the unexpected or things otherwise difficult to understand. The user may find more than he/she expects from the catalogue, in that super records for works bring together entities which may not have the same main entry heading. In fact, super records complement the concept of main entry. For example, different editions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which are entered under "Shakespeare, William" (as the main entry heading) as well as different modifications and adaptations based on *Hamlet* in which "Shakespeare, William" is an added entry, can be brought together in a super record. In current catalogues added entries do this function but not as explicitly as in super records.
- Super records for works can be seen as a bridge between the bibliographic universe and library records. With the systematic approach in super records towards bibliographic entities the searcher has the ability to move from works to specific editions to individual manifestations (i.e. to items and actual records which are an opposite extreme of works).
- Super records can overcome some of the shortcomings of online catalogues concerning the uncontrolled retrieval and display of different editions and manifestations of a given work. For example, searching under "Hamlet" in some online catalogues will retrieve too many records

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for browsing (i.e. for different editions and manifestations, works about *Hamlet*, as well as works with the title “Hamlet” written by other writers). With the super record approach, all the retrieved records for *Hamlet* will be displayed under their particular categories which show the type and nature of the relationship between the item and the work. This will make the retrieval more meaningful and manageable.

- Another factor which could indicate the value of super records is that, since in the online environment the searcher may be a remote catalogue user and may not have physical access to items in a collection, the arrangement of different editions of a work on shelves can be simulated through a relevant approach in super records. Super records for works can partially fulfil the role of classification schemes through a better arrangement of different representations of a work. In this sense, they serve a particular function to the shelf list.
- In their electronic format, super records for authors and works are dynamic and hospitable to addition, deletion and updating. They are open to links to records for new items catalogued or cancel links to items which are removed from the collection. Super records are flexible also because they can be created differently, based on the nature of each work.
- Super records can potentially extend access to electronic full texts (held in any database anywhere) by providing hyperlinks to them, for example, through the actual URL (Universal Resource Locator) address. In this sense, they provide links to what is conveniently accessible rather than what is locally held in a collection.
- Creating super records is optional for libraries in the sense that they can be made by individual libraries in relation to their actual collection. Those libraries (for example, in the field of humanities) that consider the principle of collocating of works of voluminous authors and titles important can create them according to their needs.

#### *Limitations and implications of the concept*

There are limitations with and questionmarks about any new concept. The creation of super records has the following:

- Creating super records requires a degree of knowledge about the bibliographic universe, the nature of works and the categories and sub-categories to which entities belong. Further, it requires the cataloguer consciously to create relevant links between related entities.
- While the concept relies on the computer’s ability to provide links at different bibliographic levels, the technology, for example, hypertext markup language (HTML) may not be available to all libraries yet.
- The consequences of the concept for cataloguing codes, MARC and Z39.50 need further investigation. For example, to what extent would

MARC be in need of restructuring? How far would references and added entries be needed when electronic links can function as both? The implementation of the concept may demand a new structure for the catalogue, i.e. the addition of a new file in the database for super records linked to records held in the master file in the MARC database. One solution is to have a MARC record for "works" which will be intermediate between the USMARC authority format and the USMARC bibliographic format[17].

### Conclusion

With the concept of super records for authors and titles it is possible not only to overcome some of the retrieval problems that exist in current online catalogues, it can also add to the value of the catalogue as a scholarly tool of research. The concept of super records can be an avenue for further investigation into the potential of online catalogues to fulfil the collocating function in a more exhaustive and meaningful way. Nevertheless, the consequences of the concept for cataloguing codes, MARC and Z39.50, need further investigation.

Cataloguing principles and rules can elaborate on the concept regarding the structure of the catalogue incorporating super records (including necessary indexes to super records), the types of categorizations, consistency in the terms used for different categories, the links between entities at different bibliographical levels, and also on the choice and form of headings for super records.

### Notes and references

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9. Hagler, R., *The Bibliographic Record and Information Technology*, 2nd ed., American Library Association, Chicago, IL, 1991.
10. Choosing the piece in hand as the only basic unit of description, however, does not apply to all types of publications. For example, a single issue of a serial does not provide sufficient

cataloguing data for the description and also bibliographic relationships of the whole serial. Graham[11] criticizes AACR2 for its approach towards describing serials and states that there are structural, philosophical and practical problems with that approach.

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12. Lubetzky, S., *Code of Cataloging Rules: Author and Title Entry: An Unfinished Draft*, American Library Association, Chicago, IL, 1960.
13. A prototype catalogue of super records has been created by this author using a hypertext environment. It is available at: <http://wilma.silas.unsw.edu.au/students/rfattahi/>
14. The criteria for such a decision could be provided by cataloguing codes. For example, AACR2 rule 25.1A provides that: "Base the decision whether to use a uniform title in a particular instance on: (1) How well the work is known, (2) How many manifestations of the work are involved, (3) Whether the main entry is under the title, (4) Whether the work was originally in another language, (5) The extent to which the catalogue is used for research purposes".
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