

Metadata and Bibliographic Control Collocation

Abstract

Collocation is an important part of helping patrons in the library; it is, simply, finding like materials. Collocation is facilitated through bibliographic control, using standardized language to describe and define materials in its metadata. This has led to the creation of a variety of codes and systems to create this standardized language, enabling librarians to not only find similar resources within their own libraries but also at others. Quality metadata and bibliographic control point patrons to comparable resources through such access points as author and subject header, and newer codes and functions in online library catalogs empower patrons to filter down to the best resources for their information needs.

Introduction

This briefing allows the reader to (1) understand the concept of collocation, and (2) how metadata and bibliographic control contribute to collocation.

Definition

Within the library world, collocation is being able to find like resources through a bibliographic metadata "access point" like author or subject header (Reitz, Collocation, 2013). Collocation is facilitated through bibliographic control, the creation of standardized subject headers that allow for easy reference (all books on volcanoes or English literature), or by cross-referencing information like author names and pseudonyms (e.g., J.K. Rowling, Jo Rowling and Robert Galbraith) (Reitz, Bibliographic control, 2013; Reitz, Collocation, 2013).

Purpose and implications

One of the purposes of bibliographic control is to make it easier to find like resources when doing research. In fact, Joudrey, Taylor, and Miller (2015) say that collocation is one of the three main functions of bibliographic tools, including bibliographic control (or, as they term it in this edition, "authority control") (p. 6).

Librarians quickly realized that it was easier to collocate items if they were labeled in a consistent manner. A variety of codes and systems have evolved in order to ensure that "information is organized in a consistent way within a single library and between libraries," (Lazarinis, 2015, 1.4.4 Cataloging and Classification Codes and Formats, para. 2). These organization systems include AACR2, RDA, LCC, MARC21, among others.

Metadata was originally collected within the card catalog, making it a challenge to find like resources. For every additional subject header entry, a new card needed to be made and filed on the title. While some people think that the adoption of online catalogs has broadened the scope and ease of collocation through subject headings, Janes notes in 2016 that "[t]he nature of cataloging practice and the MARC format structure are still profoundly influenced by the constraints" of the original 3x5 cards used in catalogs (p.28).

Janes (2016) has an interesting point that relying on "precoordinated subject headings... work[s], except when they fail miserably," particularly when used in a system that gives too many results and only creates confusion (p.28). But when items are catalogued well, building thorough metadata in systems that allow for more specificity, it is much easier to collocate titles using online catalogs.

One of the best benefits of modern online catalogs is the multiple ways to narrow one's search. While an original search may give a high number of results, catalog tools allow users to filter by type of resource (books, articles, videos), date of publication, and, yes, subject headers. Such filtering allows users to not only collocate related materials, but also to determine what is most useful for that person's research needs.

Examples

Example 1

To find other books by the author of the *Harry Potter* series, a woman needs to look up the title in the catalog. In a card catalog, the title card leads her to the author's name (J. K. Rowling), allowing the patron to look her up in the author catalog. Hopefully, one of the author cards notes Rowlin's pseudonym Robert Galbraith, allowing the patron to find her mystery series, but that requires a note on her original author cards, and then looking up the secondary name in the card catalog.

In a well-built online catalog, hyperlinked metadata quickly leads patrons to not only all of the other *Harry Potter* books, but also the movies based on the books, other books by J. K. Rowling, and articles and books **about** J. K. Rowling. In addition, a good system includes a cross-reference to her pseudonym, bringing up her three titles published under the name Robert Galbraith.

Example 2

Older titles stand out in online catalogs as representative of the minimalist approach to cataloging necessary when physical cards and memory capabilities limited how much data could be recorded for a given item. Lazarinis (2015) uses an old title on Greek philosophy, written by J. P. Mahaffy in 1896, to show how this title only had three subject headers: Hellenism, Greece—Social life and customs, and Greece—Civilization—To 146 B.C. (1.3 Card catalogs and OPACs, Figure 1.1). When looking up the same title in an online catalog, the subject headers were virtually identical (Southern Methodist University, *Greek life and thought from the age of Alexander to the Roman conquest*, n.d.).

Pulling up a more recent title on Greek civilization, published in 2012, shows how much more metadata is built into newer catalog listings under the latest organizational codes (Southern Methodist University, *A culture of freedom*, n.d.). Not only does the listing have twice as many subject headers, allowing for more collocation of related titles, but the listing includes a brief description of the book and its full table of contents, allowing researchers to learn more from the listing before deciding whether to pull the book from the shelf.

Conclusion

Collocation is an important service provided to library patrons. When a user asks a librarian for mystery books that feature strong women, or all books by a particular author, or resources on why volcanoes erupt, those are all functions of collocation – finding like resources, often through metadata and bibliographic control of author names and subject headers. In addition, collocation is a key component of the research process, finding multiple resources related to a topic. When quality metadata is built through bibliographic control, users have a much better chance of finding specific resources related to their unique information needs. Any librarian that works with patrons should understand how to collocate related titles and resources in order to help people find information within the library.

References

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