

Book Reviews

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Book Review Editor

BADE, David. **The creation and persistence of misinformation in shared library catalogs: Language and subject knowledge in a technological era.** Urbana-Champaign, IL: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002. 33 p. ISBN 0-87845-120-X. (Occasional paper; no. 211).

Have you recently had fun reading a scholarly paper? If you have not, or would like to read one again, here is your chance. While the issue of errors in our shared catalogues is nothing to laugh about, David Bade has done an excellent job of balancing his presentation of the problem with an appropriate measure of humour, in a short essay that can be read and appreciated in one sitting. For fun, he determines a new “species,” named *Ooopsus*: the name itself suggests the nature of the creature: a person making mistakes, and then realizing that mistakes have been made.

Bade’s work focuses on the misinformation found in the bibliographic and authority records of shared library catalogues. Misinformation is created by cataloguers, either by mistake, carelessness, or through lack of knowledge. The author identifies several types of errors, that is, (or), misinformation. Some of these errors are fatal for retrieval while others are not. However, only some errors are easy to recognize and correct. Those that remain are in the catalogue to stay. Bade concludes that typographical errors are generally easy to identify by just looking at the record. In fact, almost any user would interpret the (mis)information correctly. But even when they are easy to recognize, if they remain uncorrected, errors can still cause a record never to be retrieved when it is relevant to a search. On the other hand, there are errors in ISBD punctuation, for example, which only cataloguers will care about. Bade finds that errors in the interpretation of cataloguing rules and MARC coding errors are often difficult to detect, and may cause bibliographic records to be lost forever.

One source of many errors in cataloguing is language. Documents that cataloguers have to handle may come in a variety of languages, but the cataloguer who must handle them may only be competent in but a few of the languages. What should be done about works in other languages? Wait for another library to catalogue them and copy the records? What if no library has a cataloguer competent in that language? A cataloguer who does not have a working knowledge of the language, out of necessity, may create either a brief or incomplete record. Other cataloguers will use the record unaware that the original cataloguer was working from a less than advantageous position. If you think this is not likely to happen, here is an example from this reviewer’s native language, Slovenian. The title page of a textbook written by me would contain my name in a declined form, “Alenke Šauperl.” Would cataloguers know that only the first case, the nominative form, “Alenka,” is the form to be used for my personal name entry and its corresponding authority record?

There are also intellectual and conceptual errors. Cataloguers make these errors either because they lack sufficient knowledge of the subject of the documents they have to catalogue, or because they have insufficient time to investigate or learn about the subject. Bade presents the nature of these errors quite clearly and with a few examples of his own.

While he does not pretend to be a “super-cataloguer” Bade suggests that we, as a profession, have no knowledge, and just a handful of studies that even begin to identify the extent of the misinformation problem. While he advocates inquiring more fully into this problem, he also proposes remedies that can be applied even before more studies are set up. Additionally, all cataloguers need to consider lifelong learning as a normal part of their regular activity. This activity clearly needs to include the learning of new languages and expanding one’s education into new subject areas. Furthermore, all cataloguers need to pay closer attention to their own mistakes. It is essential that all cooperate and share their knowledge of exotic languages and subjects.