Quality, Consistency and Descriptive Cataloguing Policy: The Cataloguing of Hebrew Language Monographs in Selected Israeli University Libraries / Kedar Rochelle

Abstract

This study investigates and analyzes the quality of descriptive cataloguing records in Israeli university library catalogues. The quality of cataloguing records is paramount as it directly impacts a user's success in the discovery of relevant materials in the library's collection. The purpose of this study is to construct a typology of cataloguing errors in Hebrew monographs and to investigate the consistency of access points. The extent, characteristics and typology of errors in the descriptive cataloguing records of Israeli university libraries are unknown. The degree of agreement between the Israeli university libraries on the application of cataloguing rules pertaining to the addition and the form of access points has not been previously analyzed. This research illuminates the typology of errors by examining failure modes in cataloguing. The approach focuses not only on the dispersion of errors in the bibliographic record, but also on the reasons why these errors occur. The study also employs consistency evaluations, adapted from inter-indexer consistency studies and applied to the study of consistency in descriptive cataloguing work.

A sample of 230 items was randomly selected from a population of 566 Hebrew language non-fiction monographs, catalogued by the Jewish National Library (JNUL) in 2005, for which bibliographic records existed in the five libraries in the study. A base set of 230 cataloguing records was created by a panel of three expert cataloguers, according to Israeli cataloguing rules (Adler, Shichor and Kedar, 1995). If a rule for a specific situation was missing in the Israeli cataloguing rules, the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2, 1998, 2002) was consulted. The base catalogue records were then compared with 1,150 bibliographic records of the five libraries. Errors were evaluated, assigned a failure mode and tabulated. The quantification of errors in access fields was supplemented by the calculation of consistency rates with the base catalogue records for each of the items in the sample. For each individual cataloguing record, all access points were compared with the access points in the base cataloguing record and inter-cataloguer consistency rates were calculated using Hooper's (1965)

equation. An average inter-cataloguer consistency rate was calculated for each item from the consistency rates for the five libraries' records for each item. Interlibrary consistency (the rate of agreement between the five libraries) was also measured, based on Slamecka & Jacoby's (1965) equation for group consistency.

This study found an average of 6.44 errors per record, with almost 40% of the fields and subfields in the libraries' records containing errors. These statistics are higher than those reported in similar studies in the United States. Almost 54% of the errors stemmed from the inappropriate application of a specific rule, with close to half of the errors occurring in access fields. Corresponding to the high rate of errors, the average inter-cataloguer consistency between the base catalogue records and the records of the five libraries for all access points was 46.75%. Interlibrary consistency was extremely low at less than 15%. The low consistency rates were mainly the result of the divergent policies of the individual libraries regarding the application of differing optional rules and the absence of central authority files to which the libraries and the base catalogue records could refer.

Pearson correlations and analyses of variance were employed to examine the influence of the extent (number of pages) and the subject area of the items in the sample on the rates of error and consistency. Very weak statistical relationships were found between extent and the number of errors, and between extent and the consistency rates. A statistical relationship was found between the broad subject areas of the items and the number of errors. While a statistical relationship was exhibited between the broad subject area and interlibrary consistency rates, no statistical relationship was found with the average inter-cataloguer consistency rates. A statistical relationship was found between the consistency rates and the number of access points assigned per item, though a much stronger relationship was found between the number of different access points assigned and the consistency rates.

This research will contribute to the national bibliographic control of Hebrew language documents and aid in the improvement of cataloguing quality through heightening the awareness of the importance of interlibrary consistency in cataloguing by the promotion of written national policies of cataloguing. The rate of errors, coupled with

low interlibrary consistency rates, found in this study indicate the need for the development of a single cataloguing policy and the establishment of central authority files for all Israeli academic libraries, which would greatly enhance retrieval of records in the Israel Union List (ULI). Further research is recommended as to the factors that influence the occurrence of errors and consistency rates.

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