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Conceptualizations of Catalogers' Judgment through Content Analysis: A Preliminary Investigation

Abstract

Catalogers' judgment has been frequently mentioned, but is rarely researched in formal studies. The purpose of this article is to investigate catalogers' judgment through an exploration of the texts collected in the database of Library and Information Science Source. Verbs, adjectives and nouns intimately associated with catalogers' judgment were extracted, analyzed and grouped into 16 categories, which lead to five conceptual descriptions. The results of this study provide cataloging professionals with an overall picture on aspects of catalogers' judgment, which may help library school students and graduates and novice catalogers to become independent and confident decision makers relating to cataloging work.

Keywords: judgment, catalogers' judgment, cataloger, cataloging, conceptualization

Introduction

In the preface of *Our Enduring Values Revisited: Librarianship in an Ever-changing World*, Michael Gorman writes, “No library is an island, and libraries and the practice of librarianship have been rocked, socked, shaken, and stirred by all these societal, economic, and technological changes.”¹ It is very true that both libraries and librarians have experienced dramatic societal, economic, and technological changes over the past few decades. Perhaps being adaptive is one of the effective ways to handle these changes that have happened and may continue to happen. Such successful adaptation not only calls our effort to embrace new phenomena, fresh ideas and cutting-edge technologies, but also requires us to re-examine and reevaluate libraries’ fundamental and enduring traditions that serve as a solid foundation on which our present-day library services are built. Echoing this sentiment, this research article aims to explore one enduring cataloging tradition—catalogers’ judgment, and investigate the context that catalogers’ judgment is situated in the publications collected in the subject database of LISS (Library and Information Science Source). Therefore, the main research question governing this investigation is: how is this term, catalogers’ judgment, conceptualized in the literature of library and information science. The methodology used for the research is content analysis.

Literature Review

Catalogers’ judgment is frequently used in the operation of day-to-day bibliographical services; however, a review of the literature demonstrates that there is a lack of formal research exclusively devoted to the investigation of this term. There exist only a number of opinion-based essays concerning catalogers’ judgment written by cataloging professionals or library school

cataloging professors. Sheila S. Intner explored the concept of catalogers' judgment and its related issues through a trilogy of essays published in the journal *Technicalities*. In the 1998 article, Intner took as an example the decision on the determination of a title proper and implied that cataloging rules as explicitly written are not a wise solution to eliminate catalogers' judgment.² On the contrary, catalogers' judgment exists to "parse the questions, identify basic issues, and suggest logical outcomes"³ when attempting to apply cataloging rules. In addition to the discussion of local collection development and cataloging problems, Intner further noted that catalogers might have to act under a courageous impulse and take risks of practicing their professional judgment in the implementation of RDA (Resource Description and Access), which is not written in simple language, nor does it offer straightforward principles.⁴ In 2014 Intner concluded that catalogers' education, training, experience and exposure enables them to practice good judgment when RDA introduces flexibility into cataloging rules. By the same token, this flexibility could put library catalogs in jeopardy of losing consistency.⁵ Britta Santamauro and Katherine C. Adams observed that catalogers' judgment is not only a cataloging decision made by an individual cataloger, but also an attitude that catalogers apply in examining the cataloging work done by others. They stated that the nature of catalogers' judgment is to learn to accept different practices and acknowledge that a different choice should not be considered to be a mistake.⁶ Meanwhile, they advised that library managers have to recognize the significance of catalogers' judgment and not to micro-manage their decision-making, so that catalogers can "rule" that situation through interpretation and cataloging philosophy in order to facilitate information access.

The book, *Cataloger's Judgment: Music Cataloging Questions and Answers from the Music OCLC Users Group Newsletter*, compiles challenging music cataloging questions and practical

and knowledgeable answers provided by Jay Weitz. In answering these cataloging questions, the author did not claim that he knew everything about music cataloging, but left room occasionally for catalogers who raised the questions to apply their own judgment. One could be impressed by the main title that this book might be a study on catalogers' judgment. As a matter of fact, the author stated that "Cataloger's Judgment," chosen as the main title, will be instantly appealing to readers' eyes. Moreover, this notion highlights his belief that "cataloging is an art rather than a science."⁷ Although not a work of research, this book is very interesting to read. As is recommended by Stephen H. Wright in the book forward, "You may find yourself disabused of the common perception that catalogers are humorless drones who care nothing for the needs of library users. More importantly, though, you'll gain a new appreciation of the problems catalogers face every day, and how they solve them with grace and style."⁸

Dorothy Furber Byers researched the impact of individual cognitive style (dogmatism) on the human information process of making a decision.⁹ This research revealed that the low dogmatic subjects, namely persons with less rigidity, demonstrate the characteristic of thoroughness, which is achieved by spending more time considering alternatives, testing assumptions, and consulting available resources. This cognitive study chose catalogers purposefully as the perfect research subjects because the researcher believed that catalogers possess similar educational background and their work involves high frequency of decision-making activities. Nonetheless, determining main entry based on the information from title pages was the one and the only required decision-making activity in this study, which did not investigate catalogers' judgment more fully.

Therefore, Richard Lee Hasenyager's study is likely the only formal research on catalogers' judgment existing in the literature.¹⁰ Hasenyager examined 217 MARC records for electronic resources originally created by 79 cataloging professionals in the RDA National Test, which was

conducted from July 1 to December 31, 2010 in the United States. The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches to determine whether the theory of bounded rationality in economics, which proposes that individuals make judgments within the constructs of cognitive and time constraints, is able to explain any significant differences in catalogers' judgment. In the MARC records that Hasenyager studied, there were no instances of two identical ones. Every record was different from the rest in one way or another, and catalogers had to use their own judgment to decide what text should be entered in MARC fields and whether such textual entries were necessary. Even though variations in MARC fields demonstrated that catalogers' judgment played a significant role in the process of describing electronic resources and coding texts in MARC records, the observed findings in cataloging fields did not completely support the argument of bounded rationality in economics that a better judgment is simply a result of more time spent on the decision making, or that decision makers have fairly greater cognitive abilities.¹¹

In 1904, Charles A. Cutter articulated that "Cataloging is an art, not a science. No rules can take the place of experience and good judgment, but some of the results of experience may be best indicated by rules."¹² Ever since then, there have been a substantial number of well-thought-out points or practical wisdoms with regard to the application of catalogers' judgment addressed in journal articles from cataloging professionals' perspectives. These non-structured and loosely-scattered thoughts and opinions on catalogers' judgment among the texts offered the researcher rich resources to base this study of the phenomenon of catalogers' judgment through the approach of content analysis.

Methodology

Content Analysis

Content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.”¹³ This method originates from the study of media communication and has expanded to a variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including library and information science.¹⁴ With the review of 25 selected research articles, Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh concluded that content analysis is a systematic and rigorous approach to analyzing documents produced in library and information studies.¹⁵ A flexible and fast-growing research methodology, content analysis uses induction, or deduction, and sometimes both techniques to inspect the patterns in written texts. The inductive technique, used in this research, allows researchers to examine and categorize the selected texts and identify categories and patterns, from which themes or conceptual descriptions might be emanated and synthesized (Figure 1). The process of conceptualization will help clarify the researched definition and make better sense of various aspects of it.

In addition to its widespread use, content analysis was selected as the appropriate research methodology for this project because catalogers’ judgment is rarely studied through formal research but frequently and substantially mentioned in the literature of library and information science by cataloging professionals. This study researched the assertion of cataloger's judgment through analyzing the vocabulary used to identify perceptions, social opinions and communication of cataloging professionals, thereby conceptualizing their behaviors, attitudes, and expectations as a whole. Specifically, this study focused on the aggregation and categorization of Actions (verbs and verb phrases), Modifiers (adjectives and adjective phrases) and Conjuncts (nouns and noun phrases), which are intimately associated with catalogers’ judgment in the texts. A noun answers the question what a thing is, an adjective describes or

indicates the feature of a noun, and a verb states how an action is performed by or to a noun. Actions, Modifiers, and Conjuncts put together will give a fundamental linguistic depiction in which an object is situated, namely catalogers' judgment, in this study.

Data Collection

From 44 journals, a total number of 538 articles containing catalogers' judgment were retrieved from October 13 to 16, 2016 through the LISS database. They were published from 1972 to 2016 and have a comprehensive coverage of librarianship and the history of library studies. The preferred search term used in this study was "cataloger* AND judgment" with limitations to "English Language," "Full Text," and "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals." This search phrase helped retrieve 538 articles that contained "cataloger's judgment," "catalogers' judgment," and "cataloger ... judgment." However, it is also true that this searching term located articles with no connection to catalogers' judgment, or ones that referred to a judgment, but in another context. For example, "As a *cataloger* and librarian at the Library of Congress a hundred years later, I feel compelled to echo Babine's assertion...One wonders if Yudin, who did not receive a formal education, was responsible for so many incisive selections and how he was aided by the *judgment* of his primary book dealer." Therefore, in order to make sure that the retrieved articles were accurately related to the research question, the researcher examined and reviewed every article through the "Find" function (Ctrl+F) to search for the word "judgment" on every page. After eliminating irrelevant and duplicate articles, 159 unique ones ranging from 1980 to 2016 were retained for analysis.

Data Coding

The data coding for this study consisted of two stages: unit recording and unit categorization. The sampling units used in this content analysis were the complete statements that covered catalogers' judgment from the selected articles. These statements had a distinct semantic start and ending and they could either be a sentence, a sentence group, or simply a paragraph. The units' recording was coded into the following categories by the researcher: Selected Texts, Article Titles, Journal Titles, and Years.

During the categorization stage, the selected text units from stage one were analyzed and classified based on the following three categories: Actions, Modifiers, and Conjunctions. To ensure data reliability, the categorized data was reviewed by the researcher at different time periods, too. "Actions" refer to those verbs and verb phrases closely connected with catalogers' judgment. The tense of verbs was ignored in this study, but the modal verbs were retained as a whole, since they have a stronger indication of catalogers' sentiment or emotional color in the situation of solving a problem through their judgment. "Modifiers" collect those adjectives and adjective phrases used to directly describe catalogers' judgment. "Conjunctions" pertain to aggregate noun and noun phrases standing closely together with catalogers' judgment. Data from both stages were entered in an Excel spreadsheet.

Descriptive Analysis

Verbs and Verb Phrases

A total number of 261 text units were coded from the 159 selected articles. These articles came from 44 journals, ranging from 1980 to 2016. From 261 text units, 227 verbs and verb phrases were extracted, which were divided into five categories based on their linguistic meaning and semantic indication: obligation, option, emphasis, collaboration, and negativity (see Table 1).

“Obligation” indicates the situation where catalogers have to use their judgment to solve the cataloging problem, and this category had a total number of 107 items, constituting 47.14% of the entire group. The top three commonly-used verbs were “require,” “must (do),” and “call upon” and similar phrases. Some typical examples are:

“Cataloging, although based on prescribed rules and standards, is really an intellectual enterprise that often requires the application of cataloger’s judgment.”

“When the desired combination is not enumerated, the cataloger must exercise judgment based on the text.”

“When all attempts to locate or interpret a guideline were exhausted, I then employed ‘cataloger’s judgment’ as a last resort.”

“Option” collects verbs that imply the situation where catalogers have a possibility to perform the judgment. This category contained 78 items, consisting of 34.36% of the total. The top three frequently-used verbs were “use,” “exercise,” and “make.” Examples are

“One of the assumptions in the Task Group’s efforts to streamline cataloging was that catalogers were allowed to use their own best judgment regarding which titles to catalog at minimal, core, or full level.”

“Catalogers use taste and judgment to decide when to identify all four entities: for example, identifying every expression for every work may not be necessary.”

“I want my catalogers to have the freedom to use their judgment and trust it. That means that sometimes they will use minimal, sometimes core, and sometimes full standards.”

“Emphasis” describes the situation where catalogers are encouraged to give special attention to the usage of their judgment. This category had 24 items, or 10.57%, and the top three frequently-used examples are “emphasize,” “encourage,” and “trust.”

“Within the BIBCO program, the core record standard is applied by catalogers who have been trained in BIBCO standards that emphasize the use of using cataloger’s judgment.”

“As noted earlier, the DCRB Core standard, along with all of the core standards, encourages cataloger’s judgment in assessing the item in hand and in the choice of access points for subject headings and added entries.”

“The University of Chicago RDA implementation had three major goals: involve all catalogers in the test, minimize local exceptions, and give preference to catalogers' judgment.”

“Collaboration” groups 12 verbs and phrases and makes up 5.29%, indicating where catalogers’ judgment involved collaborative efforts. The most frequently-used ones were “develop” and “help ... to develop.” It is fairly striking to notice that the above four categories, namely obligation, option, emphasis, and collaboration account for 97.36%, or 221 out of 227 items.

“Under Associate Librarian Adelaide Underhill’s mentorship Pettee found her professional vocation as a cataloger and developed both expertise and a strong sense of professional cataloger judgment that sometime made her critical of the ideas of others.”

“Although a large amount of material was covered in a relatively short period of time, the exercises following each session were helpful in reinforcing the concepts presented in the session and allowing workshop attendees to practice and discuss their cataloger’s judgment.”

The last category, “Negativity,” only had a number of 6, making up 2.64%.

“This last fact may in some respects be the most important. After all, catalogers are human, and their judgment is consequently subject to error.”

Adjectives and Adjective Phrases

A total of 64 adjectives and adjective phrases modifying or indicating the characteristic of catalogers’ judgment were extracted from 261 text units, which were grouped into five categories: quality, subjectivity, occupation, degree, and negativity (see Table 2). “Quality” had 29 items, representing 45.31% of the total. The most frequently-used adjective is “good,” followed by “expert,” and “value.”

“There is no infallible substitute for the good judgment of the cataloger, who knows the literature and sees clearly both the service he wishes to render, and the best means of meeting this service.”

“Judgment calls—distinctions introduced in record representations due to differing but legitimate variation in expert judgment.”

“Subjectivity” had a total of 16 items, accounting for 25.00%. The most frequently-used ones were “individual,” and “interpretive.”

“Individual judgment in such matters guarantees subjectivity and thus introduces variation in entry.”

“Correct/incorrect in matters of coding, however depends entirely upon their appropriateness which can only be decided by an act of interpretive judgment concerning the item described.”

There was only one example of “Occupation,” which was “professional.” But, “professional” occurred nine times in the texts, constituting 14.06%.

“Despite the classification schedules, catalogers can exercise professional judgment, to some extent, over the item’s call number, based on other titles within the specific library’s collection and certainly over the amount and quality of information provided in the bibliographic record.”

“Degree” collected eight items, or 12.50%. The most frequently-used one was “a high degree of” and “a lot of.”

“To tell you the truth, I’m not sure that the change in presentation of bibliographic information on electronic resources, and catalogers will still have to use a lot of judgment in creating original records for electronic serials.”

“Negativity” once again was the smallest category, with only two adjectives (“weak” and “lacking”), making up 3.13%.

“Where judgment is weak or lacking, however, indiscriminate transcription from a monograph's chief sources still may achieve a description that resonates well enough with the experiences of others to identify the item.”

Conjuncts

Catalogers' judgment was linked together with 52 conjuncts together (see Table 3). 18 of these indicated "subjectivity," taking up 34.62%. Within that category, "common sense" occurred twice, with all of the rest occurring once.

"As always, catalogers should apply common sense and judgment when determining title proper."

"...concentrating both on the mechanical aspects of cataloging as well as the intellectual aspects, and taking fully into account subjective considerations and judgments made at the time of cataloging."

13 conjuncts referred to an articulation of local policy or similar phrases, representing 17.31%.

"The importance of title variant access information is intended to reflect individual cataloger's judgment and/or local institutional policy."

"Because what is determined to be 'essential' can vary by cataloger and institutions, local interpretation and cataloger judgment are needed to identify what constitutes a core record."

Nine conjuncts demonstrated a requirement of a variety of specialties and knowledge from catalogers, taking up 17.31%.

"The creation of a SAR requires domain knowledge and interpretive judgment – professional skills drawn from traditional cataloging practice."

"Also, other cataloging librarians' wisdom or judgments can be obtained by joining electronic discussion lists such as OLAC-L and the AUTOCAT electronic discussion list."

Eight conjuncts indicated a deviating approach that catalogers take to solve the cataloging problem, accounting for 15.38%.

"In many instances, random checks fails to provide specific information of how "cataloger's judgment" is to be applied and how much variation from the rules can be tolerated."

Five conjuncts addressed the familiarity of cataloging standards and took up 7.69%.

“This requires a high degree of cataloging judgment, very good understanding of national cataloging principles in addition to a thorough knowledge of CUL’s local procedures, and often a substantial knowledge of specified foreign languages.”

The last two conjuncts indicated negativity with words like “error,” and “mistake,” constituting 3.85%.

“A careless mistake made in haste would be quantitative overload. On the other, a mistake in the cataloger's judgment would be qualitative mistake.”

Conceptualization

A concept is explained as “a general idea”¹⁶ and conceptualization is defined as “the process of using thought processes and verbalization in form concepts, particularly of an abstract nature.”¹⁷

In this particular research, the concept is “catalogers’ judgment” and conceptualization is the process that further clarifies what this term implies through analyzing the texts. Specifically speaking, the research did not aim at defining what catalogers’ judgment is as a human mental model of thinking and comprehending. Instead, the researcher concentrated on gaining an overview how this term is conceived in the selected texts written by cataloging professionals through categorizing and pooling together, and synthesizing their attributes in a meaningful, logical and coherent way.

In line with the above descriptive data analysis, 16 categories were generated and they were further developed into five series of conceptual descriptions on the aspects of catalogers’ judgment (Figure 2). In the process of conceptualizing these 16 categories, the first priority was given to the domain that has the biggest cluster of items. Under such circumstances, 209 verb items aggregated in the categories of obligation, option and emphasis were extracted out accordingly, which collectively captures a theme catalogers need to determine the situation whether an action should be performed or not. The second priority was given to the categories

that simultaneously recur in Actions, Modifiers and Conjuncts, which is in this case “negativity,” suggesting the theme of misjudgment. The category of subjectivity occurs in both Modifiers and Conjuncts; however, it operates within two distinctly different contexts, one underscoring the quality of decisions and the other pointing to cataloging policies and standards. Therefore, subjectivity together with quality and subjectivity with the attachment of policies and standards were developed into two conceptual descriptions respectively. The category of collaboration conceives another separate theme and gives prominence to collective effort rather than individual endeavor.

While such conceptualizations might run the risk of falling into loose generalizations, it becomes more apparent that the data collected and analyzed through content analysis, an effective way of conceptualizing texts, does yield five noteworthy patterns, or conceptualizations as the researcher prefers to say. Five conceptual descriptions on the aspects of catalogers’ judgment are articulated here and they are listed sequentially based on the amount of items from selected texts, which supports corresponding conceptualizations. Conceptualization one on the top of all has the most weight and conceptualization five at the bottom is peripheral.

1. Catalogers’ judgment is situational.
2. Catalogers’ judgment is subjective, but is expected to be rational and good.
3. Catalogers’ judgment is subjective, but it operates in conjunction with the familiarity of local policies and cataloging standards, deviating approaches, and individual knowledge.
4. Catalogers’ judgment can be developed and improved through collective efforts.
5. Catalogers’ judgment could be a misjudgment.

Interpretation

1. Catalogers' judgment is situational. This first conceptual description emerges from the verb categories of obligation, option and emphasis. The intensely-aggregated word counts (209 items) highlight the theme that applying catalogers' judgment is determined by the cataloging situation in which practitioners get involved. The judgment could be a compulsory decision that catalogers have to make, a catalogers' choice but not an obligatory one, or an act of impulse with extra attention and care expected from catalogers, but no punishment if catalogers do not want to perform.

The first conceptualization that catalogers' judgment is situational underscores the necessity of catalogers' sensitivity responding to the cataloging problem at hand. To further elaborate on this conceptualization, the researcher would like to borrow the concept "situation awareness (SA)"¹⁸ from emergency management (for example, in aviation and ship navigation) and adapt it to the cataloging setting as "Cataloging SA." This article accept the concept of SA but would not go as far as the notion itself that usually strengthens a person's perceptions of risks and threats through analyzing relevant environmental information in a dynamic and complicated operation.¹⁹

Cataloging SA would simply focus on catalogers' sensitivity generated when the necessity of executing judgment to solve the cataloging problem could be recognized. SA is principally enriched by experience, as it is the same with Cataloging SA. Catalogers' judgment is nothing but the decision reached through the concentration on the one selection over the other or others in a particular cataloging situation. However, a proper judgment may come out of the willingness whether the cataloging situation is fully and appropriately perceived or whether it becomes an integral part of a catalogers' mindset, or whether it has been internalized as a portion of catalogers' knowledge. Unwillingness or incapability of being aware could result in the fact that catalogers will distance themselves from the valuable information that allows them to respond or

take action accordingly. Intner demonstrates an excellent example, which draws a division line between an experienced cataloger with full awareness and students without such awareness.

Now, this wouldn't be too bad if the students simply acknowledged their questions and the choices that resulted, made a decision, and stood by it. But students don't do that. They want me, as their instructor, to answer their questions with unequivocal answers and tell them which choice is correct. When I can't show them a rule that solves their problem clearly and unambiguously by pointing to one (and only one) choice, and when I say that either choice is acceptable—that is a matter of Cataloger's Judgment—their smiles evaporate, their faces fall, and their confidence in my guidance, AACR2, and the whole cataloging process wanes.²⁰

2. *Catalogers' judgment is subjective, but is expected to be rational and good.* 62 adjectives in the categories of quality, subjectivity, occupation, and degree give rise to the theme that catalogers' judgment, although bearing personal marks, is supposed to be rational and demonstrate good quality.

This conceptualization puts an expectation of quality and rationale before judgments that catalogers make. Claims that catalogers' judgment could be an intuitive decision appear in a small but significant number of adjectives. In the limited number of research and opinion-based essays with a focus on analyzing catalogers' judgment, there is no textual evidence supporting the argument that elaborates on catalogers' judgment as an intuitive decision. On the contrary, what is emphasized is that catalogers' judgment should be solidly based on a foundation that combines “education and training, experience and exposure, and thoughtful decision-making.”²¹ There is no doubt that catalogers' judgment involves personal feelings, thoughts, and even preferences. Such involvement should be considered as a good approach only if it comes out of a good motive and intention, for instance, for the convenience of users or the systemization of the library's databases, not for the convenience of cataloging work. Intuitive decisions that merely serve the purpose of a catalogers' self-interest or unethical thoughts should be totally rejected.

3. *Catalogers' judgment is subjective, but it operates in conjunction with the familiarity of local policies and cataloging standards, deviating approaches, and individual knowledge.* This conceptualization is supported by 49 conjuncts next to catalogers' judgment, which fall in the categories of subjectivity, local policy, special knowledge, deviating approach, and standards' familiarity.

Even though Hasenyager's study neither supports nor rejects the theory of bounded rationality that decisions are made within the constructs of cognitive ability and time, it does indicate that catalogers' judgment is not a siloed decision-making activity, but coupled with other factors that need to be considered, such as local policies and training on cataloging standards.²² This conceptualization complies with Hasenyager's indication and it also underscores the importance that catalogers' judgment lies in the recognition that one size doesn't fit all in the application of cataloging rules, especially when some of those rules are long, complicated, and sometimes incomprehensible. In addition to the fact that catalogers have to be familiar with those cataloging rules, local policies or guidelines may function as supplements covering the areas that national standards may not, for instance, the application of local subject headings and the usage of foreign subject headings and other types of controlled vocabularies in bibliographical records. Chances are that local policies and guidelines may require that catalogers take a different approach, possibly deviating from or even contradicting national standards for the benefits of local users' convenience. While deviating approaches run the risk of generating inconsistency in the system, inconsistency is not necessarily bad or wrong. But if being inconsistent or being "wrong" consistently, that would be considered as "correct" in cataloging when it comes to the term that global changes or batch updates need to be performed. In addition, catalogers who possess a good knowledge base of a subject discipline, a particular special collection or a foreign language

would uphold national cataloging standards and help improve such deviating approach in an effective way at the very first moment when the cataloging judgment has to be made in a local library setting.

4. Catalogers' judgment can be developed and improved through collective efforts. The fourth conceptualization is extracted from the category of collaboration, which includes 12 verbs and verb phrases. This conceptualization indicates that catalogers' judgment could be growing better through group collaborations.

This conceptualization is strongly supported in Karen Snow's study on the investigation of cataloging quality, which concludes that cataloging is a community practice and collaborative efforts will "help hone catalogers' judgment."²³ Hasenyager's study also announces an interesting finding in his investigation of catalogers' judgment that the "experience levels of those catalogers who are in mid-career (6-22 years of experience) are better prepared for RDA than any other group,"²⁴ and "a collaborative workflow, whether at the same location or not, will yield more results than an isolated one."²⁵ Hasenyager also recommends that "training and communities of practice will provide the knowledge needed to lead to better cataloging decisions."²⁶

At the present time, catalogers have a new cataloging guideline, RDA, which puts every cataloger at the same starting point and the entire cataloging community is in great need of training in its comprehension and application. It could be true that mid-career catalogers have accepted RDA, but both novice and extremely-experienced or veteran catalogers have skeptical, cautious and critical opinions about RDA. AACR2 goes together with MARC21, and RDA gives rise to BIBFRAME. Once BIBFRAME becomes mature, change might happen fast. The

question is whether we are all going to row the boat together now, or will some row in different directions, or will some just stand on the shore.

5. *Catalogers' judgment could be a misjudgment.* The last conceptualization originates from the category of negativity, which contains 7 terms simultaneously existing in Actions, Modifiers, and Conjuncts. Compared with the 343 total items, they are fairly small in number, but their significance is worth noting, since they recur in Actions, Modifiers, and Conjuncts.

This conceptualization seems to suggest that imperfect judgment occasionally made by catalogers is unavoidable. A once-in-awhile imperfect judgment does not denounce the value of catalogers' entire work. Imperfect judgment could happen to any cataloger. Intner suggests that "new catalogers, poorly trained catalogers, catalogers pressured to meet production quotas, and catalogers unfamiliar with particular formats, subjects, or genres of resources"²⁷ tend to make errors in their judgments. Experienced catalogers are not necessarily exempted from making imperfect cataloging judgment, either. Hasenyager's study does not support the phenomenon of catalogers' judgment through the lens of bounded rationality. His study does point out that experienced catalogers do not necessarily generate MARC records with more text entered than inexperienced ones in the RDA cataloging test.²⁸

RDA aims to "develop catalogers' judgment to know not only *what* identifying characteristic to provide, but *why* they are providing it—to meet a user need"²⁹ through description and access elements integrated with FRBR users' tasks. Perhaps, it is the time that our cataloging culture, deeply-rooted in the soil of AACR2 quality cataloging, should be reexamined and transformed into a new one which advocates that the exercise of catalogers' judgment is of equal importance to acceptance of the judgment made by other catalogers.³⁰ Catalogers' judgment is made for a

better purpose, not necessarily for a perfect result that takes a longer time at the cost of depriving users' access. Another way to put it is "catalogers' judgment is only as good as the cataloger making that judgment."³¹

Conclusion

This study investigated how catalogers' judgment is conceptualized in the texts written by cataloging professionals in the library and information literature. Catalogers' judgment is a decision made by cataloging professionals to solve a practical problem in library settings, and this decision is of paramount importance to catalogers' work.

By analyzing verbs, adjectives, and nouns that are closely associated with catalogers' judgment in library and information science literature, five conceptualizations emanated from the texts and have distinctive attributes relating to catalogers' work. Four of the conceptualizations demonstrate that catalogers' judgment bears strong personal traits that are reinforced by awareness, rationale, knowledge, and quality. Although as an individual decision-making activity, one conceptualization shows that catalogers' judgment can also be developed and improved through community learning. Community learning becomes even more significant in this era when catalogers' work is encompassed by the new cataloging guideline RDA that favors ambiguity and flexibility over clarity and specificity. The conceptualizations in this study may be of significant interest to both library school students and recent graduates just beginning their cataloging professions. With the understanding of these five aspects of catalogers' judgment, library school students and graduates will enhance their cataloging situational awareness, becoming more motivated in increasing their decision-making skills and confidence, and eventually developing more self-efficacy relating to their work and abilities.

Limitations and Future Work

As a preliminary and pioneering investigation, this research provides an initial and conceptual overview on catalogers' judgment and lays groundwork to be followed by continuing studies. Therefore, it has limitations that need to be addressed for the benefit of future work. First and foremost, this research was conducted on a sufficient but small number of journal articles, which means that texts in cataloging textbooks, cataloging blogs, videos and even emails disseminated through cataloging professionals' listservs, remain uninvestigated. Follow-up researches could expand the texts into a much larger pool for selection and analysis. Second, the designed search term "cataloger* AND judgment" retrieves articles written in American English only, and articles in British English (i.e., "cataloguer") were therefore not included. It is recognized that the findings could be "language biased." Third, data involved in this study was reviewed, coded and categorized by one single coder only. The coder was also the researcher. To enhance the data reliability, the same data could be coded and categorized by different coders. Both of the results would be compared through standard data reliability checking procedures.

To overcome those limitations, it is suggested that this study could be replicated with a much larger pool of texts and extra help from research assistants. It is conceivable that further studies would lead to more interesting and significant findings. For instance, even though one of the significant findings of this study is the first conceptualization that catalogers' judgment is situational, further analysis has not been conducted to determine under what specific circumstances the judgment is obligatory, optional or encouraged. If this question can be answered in future research work, it would be of great help for library school students and novice cataloging professionals to raise their awareness of those necessary indicators, so that they could be guided to step into making judgment without any hesitation.

Note

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- ¹ Michael Gorman, preface to *Our Enduring Values Revisited: Librarianship in an Ever-changing World*, by Michael Gorman (Chicago: ala editions, 2015), xii.
- ² Sheila S. Intner, "Stream of Consciousness: Lessons in Cataloger's Judgment," *Technicalities* 18, no. 10 (1998), 2-3.
- ³ Intner, "Stream of Consciousness: Lessons in Cataloger's Judgment," 3.
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