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Folklore Requirements for Bibliographic Records:

Oral Traditions and FRBR

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SUMMARY. The treatment of bibliographic information in library catalogues is biased by the primacy of printed written resources. This legitimate bias hinders oral tradition resources from being accurately described and accessed. This kind of resources is important in any society, but central in indigenous societies, at least for the comprehension of the printed written resources of these societies. The FRBR Model allows a better treatment of oral tradition works, versions and items. It can express the essential fact that oral traditions works are independent even when their manifestations are not, collective and not anonymous, plural but not impossible to grasp. One deep doubt remains concerning the compatibility of the FRBR notion of expression and the notion of version.

KEYWORDS. Oral tradition, bibliographic description, indigenous peoples, notion of work, variants

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Introduction

The way indigenous people and resources are treated in libraries is getting better – in some libraries, in some countries. In most of public libraries and in the National Library of New Zealand, for example, many specific services are offered to the Mäori persons: you can be informed in the Mäori language, specific information on Mäori collections are available, the spiritual value of some documents is acknowledged, traditional rituals can take place, partnerships between the libraries and the Mäori groups are established… As far as collections are concerned, Mäori resources benefit from a kind of affirmative action, indigenous heritage is digitized, attention and funds are devoted to indigenous resources and not only to resources about the Mäori… (further details in (Nicolas 2003)). However there is one aspect of libraries that is much less efficient and innovating from the indigenous point of view: the catalogs. Admittedly, the highly needed Mäori Subject Headings are in preparation. Alas, you would hardly find another example. Today, if you search several versions of the Mäori creation myth, you will retrieve some noise (Christian proselytizing and tales for western children) and much silence. Even in New Zealand, catalogs are very ignorant of indigenous resources, particularly of oral tradition resources, essential to indigenous culture. And yet, these indigenous resources exist actually in libraries. But our cataloging rules and tools have not been designed in a way able to give them any bibliographic existence. So, how to reform our bibliographic habits and principles so that indigenous resources and hence indigenous patrons are better treated? Preliminary question: must we reform them? Some would argue that libraries have not been invented for oral traditions and suggest that it is up to indigenous actors to adopt editorial practices adapted to the libraries and their catalogs. Paradoxically, the opponents of these reforms join the indigenous advocates of radical separation who propose to build new libraries ex nihilo according to needs, concepts and objectives proper to indigenous traditions. This option is sound and may yield innovations. However, a lot of indigenous resources are held by western libraries and, if we oppose systematic repatriation, we cannot avoid to give them a better place and treatment in our stacks and our catalogs, along with other documents.

The basic hypothesis of this paper is that the FRBR model is a good instrument to enhance the bibliographic condition of oral tradition resources. I know that the principal objective of the FRBR

model was not to promote the indigenous documents in libraries. Though compatible with all sorts of materials, the favourite application domain of the model is the printed book. The aim of this paper is to see if, even as a free rider, the oral tradition resources can benefit from the FRBR model.

1. The notion of Oral Tradition Work (OTW)

The idea of grouping various versions of a myth or an epic under a common label matches ordinary practices of people who tell, collect and comment myths or epics. This is true for whatever theories of OTW one has. There are at least three kinds of theories of OTW:

1. The oral tradition transmits the one and only version of the myth, as it always existed, *sub specie æternitatis*. This theory of myth as everlasting, unchanging, scrupulously transmitted in a canonical form, is often the official theory of communities investigated by anthropologists.

2. Versions follow versions, they are not identical but everyone pretends they are. In that case, a new version supersedes the precedent one. The myth is, as it were, updated. Here, in cataloging terms, the myth is not a finite resource, but a continuing integrating resource. The notion of work is still relevant, even if this work is associated with only one version, as it is the latest one.

3. Versions follow versions, they are similar and are to coexist in people's minds or in information systems. Here, the notion of work is still relevant but now necessary because there are many versions that are explicitly to be collocated. This paper favors the third theory, but by itself the FRBR model and its application to OTW are neutral on that score.

The point is here that the notion of oral tradition work does not assume any specific theory of oral tradition. In cataloging terms, an OTW can be either a finite resource or a continuing integrating resource. This neutrality is an important feature of the notion of OTW (and hence of the FRBR model, whose core is the notion of work).

Nevertheless, is this notion of oral tradition work compatible with the most recent theories of oral tradition, as developed by cognitive anthropology (cultural anthropology renovated thanks to cognitive psychology)? In other words, does the FRBR model not repeat the recurrent mistake made by anthropologists when they hypostasize the myth beyond singular performances and describe the

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oral tradition process as the transmission of this myth, regardless of superficial variations?[1] According to these conceptions, the work is the content shared by all its various versions and all the performances that embody it.

The latter definition is the same as the definition of "work" stated by the *FRBR Final Report:*

"The work itself exists only in the commonality of content between and among the various expressions of the work" (FRBR Final Report 1998, 16).

The cognitive anthropologist Pascal Boyer has demonstrated that the notion of myth conceived as the content shared by its various performances is confusing and dispensable to explain and describe traditional facts (Boyer 1990). I think that the same conception is also dispensable in order to understand or legitimate the FRBR model and, a fortiori, its application to oral tradition works. I propose the three following arguments against the above-mentioned definition:

1. To define the notion of work with the notion of content is not realistic because it introduces in cataloging rules new content analysis requirements too strong to comply with.

2. This definition is defeated by what can be called Borges' thought experiment: when by a mere chance he produces the same text as Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, the fictive character Pierre Ménard creates a new work (Borges 1994). Let us change to a slight extent Borges' hypothesis by replacing "text" with "content" (though identity conditions for content are far more elusive than for a text). Now we can assume that two works sharing exactly the same content can still be two strictly different works.

3. This definition has this counter-intuitive consequence: the work content changes as far as new versions appear. If you conceive the work content as the intersection of versions contents, it must shrink continually; if you conceive it as the union of versions contents, it dilutes continually.

The work is an abstract object, but this feature does not imply that it is only defined by its content. Its identity conditions are not exclusively semantic. They are above all historical and normative. Such a correction is far from providing a new definition of "work". But such a new definition is not my point here. My point is rather that cataloging of works as such does not require to analyse the content of versions contents to verify that they match work content. Such a verification is impossible from a practical point of view, but it is also impossible from a logical point of view

because it would encounter a vicious circle:

1. A text is a version of the work W if it contains W's content.

2. W's content is delimited by the content shared by all W's versions.

For lack of a sound definition of the notion of work, let us be content with this pragmatic attitude: we need to assume the notion of work because versions (resp. expressions) must be versions (resp. expressions) of something. If we want to collocate versions, we need to give them a common address. Admittedly, this does not imply to create bibliographic records for works.

2. Returns from FRBR

In the preceding section, we had to give up the definition of "work" accepted by the FRBR model in order to avoid any objection against the mere idea of oral tradition work. From now on, nothing hinders oral tradition resources from benefiting from FRBR conceptual tools. In this section, I will inventory returns expected from the FRBR model and precise for each benefit which conceptual tools legitimate these expectations.

2.1 To draw attention to versions themselves and to their relationships

The definition of the myth as content shared by the various versions led the anthropologists and folklorists to replace the diversity of versions with one canonical version ("version de référence"). This canonical version can be a real one, deemed a *primus inter pares*, or an artificial, *ad hoc* version, like a digest produced by the scholar. In both cases, the unique version is supposed to stand for all the other versions, i.e. the work itself. Hence, to give up the semantic definition of "work" helps to restore intrinsic value of versions. But as soon as you underline intrinsic value of versions, you should add that a version lacks any intrinsic meaning and interest without the neighborhood of other versions. How to understand this neighborhood between versions? What kind of relationship is there between various versions of an OTW?

From a conceptual point of view, the various versions of an OTW do not make up a simple set, but a series. It is true for all kinds of works, not just for OTW. For instance, from a historical and causal point of view, the various translations of Hamlet do not proceed vertically from the work *Hamlet,* but proceed from one (or many) specific English expression(s) (via item(s) and manifestation (s)). Sometimes, it may happen that all the subsequent expressions proceed from one single expression, for example the first published expression.

With regard to oral traditions, it is never possible for subsequent versions to proceed directly from the first version. They must proceed from a contiguous version, recently heard (even if this version claims to report a previous one, maybe the first one). They must proceed from a version that is a neighbor, in chronological and causal terms. You can find analogies with text philology and text genetics. In philology of manuscripts, for examples, the ideal stemma would demonstrate how the version Vn proceeds from Vn-1 and ultimately from the version V0, the idealized first version. In text genetics, the analysis of draft versions reconstruct the history of versions superseding versions, until the last, eventual and definitive one. The original feature of oral traditions is the following one: there is neither first version, nor last one.

As far as OTW are concerned, these horizontal relationships between versions have something more interesting and subtle. In the oral tradition phenomenon, the production of a new version for an audience relies on common memory and common knowledge of previous versions of the same work. Moreover, the narrator relies on this common memory to introduce variations with regard to previous versions. These innovations may concern the plot, a character, a name, a tone, a rhythm… The meaning and the value of a version lie often in these variations which are deemed to be superficial. This play with public expectations is often the key factor of the literary or strategic success of an oral performance.

This play with recollections and contrasts implies a more general feature of oral traditions, which was alluded above. To possess a traditional dimension, an event or a document must refer to previous events or previous documents.[2] This reference may be implicit or explicit, precise or vague, direct or indirect. An oral performance may refer directly to a previous performance but just in order to refer ultimately to the version embodied in this previous performance. Israel Scheffler's paper

"Ritual and Reference" (Scheffler 2002) demonstrates how this referential structure can be understood with the conceptual tools forged by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of art* (Goodman 1976). Remember that reference to the past does not imply that new versions be identical to previous ones (or the first one!). On the contrary, we saw above that the quest for equilibrium between reference to the past and surprises is probably the most beautiful and efficient string of oral traditions.

Now a paradox: this play with recollections and contrasts explains much of the stability of orally transmitted works. In other words, versions are similar not in spite of the oral transmission, but thanks to it. Indeed, this play with echoes and dissonances between versions is impossible when differences are too frequent or salient and when the similarities are too loose. With the advent of writing and printing, audience becomes absent and imaginary. It becomes more difficult to rely on common memories or shared references. Then, there are only two attitudes left. Either you repeat and copy the letter of recorded versions, or, according to the opposite attitude, you explore more and more original versions. You cannot enjoy any longer this subtle kind of relationships between versions which is so characteristic of oral traditions.

The relationships between the various versions of the same myth are so peculiar that you cannot find their expression in the classification of bibliographic relationships provided by the *FRBR Final Report* (5.3). Let us turn back to our classical case: a version Vn refers to a previous version Vn-1 and to its significant differences with regard to Vn-1. Vn is neither a sequel, nor an adaptation, nor an imitation. "Variation" could be seen as a more promising kind of relationship, but it has a very peculiar meaning, valid only in musical contexts. One more problem: these kinds of bibliographic relationships stand between different works or between expressions that embody different works. But our principal presupposition is that different versions of a myth are the versions of the same myth, the same oral tradition work. In FRBR terms, we are looking for "derivation" relationships that stand between versions of OTW. We have a new problem again: according to the *FRBR Final Report*, when an expression "derives" from another one, the derived one is "autonomous" and not "referential" – because it does "not normally require reference to the prior expression in order to be used or understood" (FRBR Final Report 1998, 72). But we saw that one of the most peculiar features of oral traditions lies in the succession of versions which refer to each other. Moreover, as there is no original

version, each version is a "referential expression" which refers to another "referential expression". This specific structure is the reason why relationships between versions of an OTW should be established and documented, as much as possible.

One could argue that, in order to draw attention to versions and their horizontal relationships, it is not necessary to group them under the notion of OTW. Horizontal relationships may suffice to do the job, without any relationship with the parent work record. We will see next that the notion of OTW meets several needs, which legitimate the creation of parent records for works and expressions.

2.2 To acknowledge the oral nature and the traditional nature of OTW

Our dual argument can be summarised in the following way:

1. Even if a document embodies an oral work, this does not imply that this document is oral or that it embodies an oral version. However, even in these circumstances, it is important to specify the oral nature of the work embodied by this document and expressed by this version. There is no better place where to do so than in a work record.

2. Even if a document embodies a traditional work, this does not imply that this document is traditional or that it embodies a traditional version. However, even in such circumstances, it is important to specify the traditional nature of the work embodied by this document and expressed by this version. There is no better place to do so than in a work record.

It is essential to specify the oral nature of a work because this indication compels to treat all the documents that embody this work in a different way, even when these documents are writings and embody a written version of this oral work (for instance, a published diary written by a missionary whose hobby was ethnography, in which a myth is quoted). The oral nature of the quoted myth compels to pay attention to some kind of information that is deemed to be irrelevant or optional otherwise. That is true of information about performance contexts of oral works. FRBR attribute 4.2.5 "intended audience" becomes here especially important (e.g. "women of the tribe"), even when the manifestation that embodies the oral work has a different intended audience ("academics"). In the

musical domain, an orchestral work (work attribute 4.2.8) can be realized through a piano expression (expression attribute 4.3.17).

The context of an oral work comprises audience and performance circumstances (including common knowledge of previous versions). Strictly speaking, the same is true of written works: writing, editing and printing are events and processes that occur in a certain context, as does the oral performance. However, one could argue that the oral performance context is easier to circumscribe and to describe and, as a consequence, should play a greater role in the interpretation of the performance (and of the document), the version and the work.

Similarly, a traditional work can have non traditional versions and non traditional documents. For instance, in the classical situation of ethnography, when an anthropologist is listening to an indigenous informant, one can hardly say that the scholar always collects a traditional version of a traditional work. From a statistical point of view, libraries rarely hold traditional versions of traditional works. Versions (and the corresponding documents) possessed by libraries are usually non traditional versions that derive from traditional versions. That is true of versions embodied in anthropologists' writings or colonial civil servants' (and in tale books for western children). On the contrary, some libraries hold audio records or carvings that are authentic traditional items, or items embodying traditional versions of traditional works.

The point is that the distinction between traditional versions and non traditional versions (resp. documents) must yield an analogous distinction in the bibliographic realm. It should be clear by now that what I wrote in the preceding section about relationships between versions is valid only for and between traditional versions.

2.3 To promote intangible cultural heritage

FRBR works, expressions and manifestations[3] are subcategories of intangible cultural heritage. Until recently, UNESCO devoted itself to the safeguarding of material cultural heritage, i.e. material objects as cities, bridges or rare books (FRBR items). For some years, UNESCO has been extending

the scope of its action to encompass intangible cultural heritage, which comprises "*the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage*" (UNESCO 2003). One can interpret the notion of "expressions" mentioned in this excerpt as including FRBR works and FRBR expressions (but not only oral and traditional works and expressions).

I suggest to see in this recent initiative a valuable opportunity for libraries to realize their responsibilities concerning the preservation and promotion of intangible heritage (this heritage can be alive or dead, i.e. latent, available for any revival). For libraries, this strategy can follow two directions:

1. To take part in programs of inventory of intangible cultural heritage, as promoted by the Convention. We must take advantage of a very favorable conjunction between two independent projects: on the one hand, the inventory program of the UNESCO Convention and, on the other hand, the international process of revision of cataloging principles and rules in which the FRBR concepts play a major role. It is a rare opportunity to develop cooperation between librarians, anthropologists and human "bearers" of cultural heritage. Admittedly, these two projects have different perspectives: UNESCO inventories aim at listing and classifying intangible entities embodied in human practices and hence in human beings; the ultimate goal of the Paris principles or ISBD revision process is to catalog immaterial entities embodied in objects. However, the case of oral traditions demonstrates that boundaries between projects are uncertain and objectives complementary. That is also true of the musical domain (MusicAustralia[4]) and of theatre (Le Bœuf 2002). AustLit Gateway has demonstrated that the same can hold true in the literary domain.

2. To devise collection development policies involving intangible bibliographic entities, and not only material entities. Today, most of collection development principles are formulated in terms of manifestations, items and headings, but works and expressions are often implicit. The FRBRization of library catalogs should make it possible to formulate collection development policy explicitly in terms of works and expressions. Let us start with a basic example: it should be possible to count easily the number of items for a work. The notion of holdings, which is today relevant only at the manifestation

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level, will become relevant at the expression and work levels, by upwards inheritance (interesting by-product: the scope of a reservation will be an item, as today, but also a manifestation, an expression or the work). One can imagine more complex cases: is this expression of the work X over-represented? should one acquire more traditional versions of this traditional work? do we hold too many written manifestations of oral works? do we hold too many oral manifestations of written works? In this domain, should we increase the number of works, of translated expressions, of manifestations or should we simply increase the number of items, whatever they are?…

FRBR by itself is potentially a valuable and powerful tool for collection development policy, and so even more for oral tradition resources where the question of versions and expressions is more crucial than in many other domains.

2.4 To acknowledge the intellectual property rights

The application of FRBR to OTW would make it possible to express the cultural and intellectual property rights more precisely and accurately. That is true, for example, for the mention of contributors or the mention of use rights.

First, to introduce the distinction between the four FRBR levels (works, expressions, manifestations, items) makes it possible to document with greater precision the respective roles of each contributor. In the case of a mythic story edited by an anthropologist, one must express the individual realization of an expression (the collected and transcribed text) by an indigenous performer, the collective creation of a myth (work) by a people, the individual creation of a preface (work) by the anthropologist. Until now, either the contribution of the people, a collective author, is fully forgotten (as if the work were anonymous), or the name of the people is treated like a subject heading (as if stories created by a people across generations were nothing but collective autobiographies or as if the works of traditional people had been created to be used as documentary sources by western scholars).

Second, to introduce the distinction between the four FRBR levels makes it possible to define precise use rights for each entity. For example, some versions of an OTW can be restricted to specific

groups of persons (women, priests…). In that case, you need to identify the relevant esoteric versions explicitly in order to apply the good use restrictions.

2.5 To refloat the sunken works

In the libraries that are rich in colonial traces, oral tradition works constitute a second library inside the library. An invisible and scattered library. Manifestations of OTW are neither censured nor deliberately hidden. They have been so to speak absorbed by the colonial intellectual production. Indeed, manifestations of OTW are often component parts of host items. They are immersed inside colonial documents. More precisely, OTW exist only as parts of composite works. A typical case: a book written by an officer of indigenous affairs, a missionary or an anthropologist in which an indigenous traditional work is quoted or summarized. This written version can be more or less valuable. However, that is not the point.

Here, we have to cope with a colonial work which has an indigenous oral work as component part. It is not a composite manifestation (two works published together), but a composite work. The host work cannot exist without the hosted one. The latter existed before the former and may have other instances in other works or alone in an autonomous manifestation. Notwithstanding, the library catalog describes only the manifestations of the dependent host work and says nothing about the hosted but independent work. The ontologically autonomous work is bibliographically dependent on the ontologically dependent work. Of course, everyone is aware of the reasons that explain and partially justify this strange situation.

Chapter 5 of FRBR final Report deals with bibliographic relationships, among which part-whole relationships. Section 5.3.1.1 provides a solution to our strange situation. It concerns part-whole relationships between works. Some works are "dependent" parts of their whole (chapter, volume, illustration). Others are "independent" (journal article). An OTW hosted by a colonial work is clearly an "independent part". Thanks to these concepts, one can imagine an autonomous description of OTW (hence at the work level, not at the manifestation level), even when their

embodiment is always dependent on the manifestations of host colonial works. It is the case for the traditional works created by extinct traditional peoples.

This opportunity to refloat OTW and hence to redress some colonial grievances is, according to me, the most urgent task for the application of FRBR to OTW. Moreover, this task is so basic that it is a preliminary condition to benefit from the other potentialities of the FRBR model. Indeed, as far as OTW are concerned, the challenge is not to FRBRize actual records, because such records do not exist. They have to be created ex nihilo. The task is greater than for other resources, but, from another point of view, it is less constrained by the weight of the past. That is why the domain of oral tradition resources is a good experiment ground to explore all the potentialities of the FRBR model.

2.6 Conclusion

The FRBR model is a promising tool to express the three kinds of contexts that are inherent in oral tradition resources:

1. Work context ("this document embodies this work, through this version")

2. Performance context ("this document is the trace of an event which occurs in such circumstances, with the contribution of so-and-so, in such tone…")

3. Document context ("this version is always embodied in such colonial manifestations").

3. From theory to practice

We saw which potential benefits the application of the FRBR model can bring to OTW. Now, we have still to imagine how to make this application actual. I will suggest some possible directions and propose more questions than answers.

3.1 Pre-colonial and colonial FRBR schemas

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In the pre-colonial context of traditional and oral societies, the implementation of the FRBR model would produce a schema not very different from the following one:

– many expressions per work

– only one manifestation per expression

– only one item per manifestation.

First, as human memory is fallible and deliberate innovation can be desired, each oral performance (item) embodies a new expression of the OTW. Second, the manifestation level seems to be irrelevant.[5] Third, one could argue that a performance is a strange item. But, if it is unusual to consider an event as an item, it is for practical, not conceptual reasons: a library holds objects, continuants, not events, occurrents.

From the opposite perspective, in the "colonial" context which is the context of most libraries, the impact of writing and printing on OTW is easy to read in the following schema:

– some expressions per work

– some manifestations per expression

– some items per manifestation.

The striking point in this schema is its lack of originality. In the colonial context, OTW are collected by casual visitors, then transcribed, translated and printed. Eventually, OTW are treated exactly the same way as works designed for publishing. It is even truer when OTW are immersed in a host work. But we have already seen that the FRBR model makes it possible to refloat sunken OTW.

Neither of these scenarios seems to be satisfactory. The first one yields too many expressions. The second one too few. An intermediate scenario will emerge as libraries and archives focus on unpublished collections (manuscripts, archives, oral history) and reproduce them. Then, new expressions, new manifestations (reproductions, publications) and new items will appear.

3.2 Versions and expressions

It is now time to answer the following crucial question that we have delayed: how to interpret the notion of expression when applied to OTW? For textual documents, the FRBR notion of expression is supposed to equate with the notion of text. Two textual items embody the same expression if they contain the same text, whatever their editorial differences – which are relevant only at the manifestation level.

This usual interpretation of the notion of expression is not fitted to OTW. If the expression of an OTW is defined by its textual identity, oral transmission can never comply with such identity conditions. Should we conclude that two oral performances embody two different expressions from the fact that these two performances contain two different texts? Is such a strictly textual notion of FRBR expressions a very useful tool for the user who wants to select one oral tradition resource among many? In most cases, the user does not look for a precise text of an OTW, but for a version. What does it mean? The same version can be embodied by two different texts that share a common plot, characters, pragmatic features (an esoteric version, a version for some occasions…). Is the FRBR model able to account for this notion of version, so intuitive in traditional contexts? I think so.

The FRBR definition of the notion of expression uses the notion of notation. Texts and musical scores are paradigms of expressions. A text is also a string of symbols complying with a linguistic notational system. A score is a string of symbols complying with a musical notational system. Notations are very helpful because they can be used to define unambiguous identity conditions of a given entity. That is why, in *Languages of Art,* Nelson Goodman can dispense with any ontology of art thanks to his theory of notation. Identity conditions are just compliance with a notation. In *Languages of Art,* the limits of a sonata are the limits of its score. Unlike Goodman, the FRBR gives more latitude to works, as it defines them with the vague notion of content. But the model proposes to determine the identity of expressions (not all of them) with reference to notations. However, in the literature on FRBR, the notion that seems uneasy to grasp is not the concept of work, but the concept of expression. If it is so, it is not because the notion of expression is flawed, but because it is flexible: if an expression is sometimes relative to a notation, then one can imagine several expression types for a given work – as many expression types as relevant notations.

Even for textual works, the FRBR model does not imply that expressions are texts – or, at least, only texts. The meaning of the expression level depends on the notational system elected to "parse" the various manifestations and items. As far as OTW are concerned, one could have recourse to a notation proper to oral tradition studies, for example based on the Aarne-Classification (Aarne 1987). Expressions would be equivalence classes built on episodes or motifs found in manifestations, not on alphabetical characters. It is likely that such expressions would be very similar to the versions identified by indigenous peoples and anthropologists.

As a consequence, are we compelled to give up the expression conceived as a text? Do we have to choose between the expressions-texts and the expressions-versions? Not necessarily. The same document that embodies only one OTW could actually embody several expressions at once: an expression-text and an expression-version. Besides, for a given work, each expression-text would be a subset of an expression-version, because the same expression-version could be… expressed by various different texts. Moreover, if we have several notations à la Aarne-Thompson, the same item would embody several expressions-versions. Is such a proliferation of expressions a useless heresy ? Though heterodox, this proposition should be scrutinized because it would help to meet the diversity of users' needs.

This interpretation of the notion of expression is at odds with the examples of the FRBR final Report and probably also its letter, but it seems to be consistent with its objectives and with the logical place occupied by the notion of expression in the overall architecture. This architecture is composed of three abstract objects levels : the work level, so to speak the more abstract level ; the manifestation level, so to speak the less abstract one ; the expression level, indefinite intermediate level between two ultimate kinds of abstract objects. In other words, between the work level, maximal class which has all the items as members, and the manifestation level which groups items which have only spatio-temporal differences, there is room for an indefinite number of items groups. One can build these groups depending on many properties of manifestations and above all depending on the needs of the users of the works.[6] Here is perhaps the source of the difficulties encountered with the notion of expression in the debates in the FRBR community : every one is looking for the good

criterion to build expressions but maybe the model has not to decide which criterion is the good one. It is rather up to FRBR implementers and ideally to users to decide.

This way of interpreting the notion of expression is not compatible with the four-tier tree-like diagrams often drawn to represent an FRBR structure. The tier of expressions becomes more complex. It can host mutually excluding expressions as before, but also overlapping and nested expressions. It "only" remains to know whether this conception is compatible with the principal objectives and principles of the model. If it were, the major challenge would be to tame this proliferating realm of expressions, inhabited by entities that are volatile but nevertheless of some importance for users.

Conclusion

The FRBR model has a universal scope and it is no wonder that it can encompass the oral tradition resources domain. Nevertheless, the application of the model to OTW presents different degrees…

One can imagine a minimal application, without any specific adaptation to and benefit for indigenous resources. But even in this case, the amount of work is huge because the FRBRization strategy is not available: work and expression records cannot be generated from previous manifestation records.

The further degree of application can solve some of the difficulties of the first one. Indeed, the use of FRBR part-whole relationships between works permits to dispense with specific manifestation records for oral tradition resources. It is true when an OTW is a part of another already described work.

The last level of application of the FRBR model to oral tradition resources involves the notion of version, a crucial concept but not so easy to translate in FRBR words. There, more difficulties appear because identity conditions of an expression-version are far more elusive than identity condition of expressions-texts. Identifying versions of OTW require some general conventions but also much knowledge about particular oral traditions to treat. Librarians cannot do this job alone.

Generally speaking, most of cataloging work would be impossible without the more or less tacit cooperation with the publishers. Librarians produce some metadata but also reuse metadata provided by publishers. It should be the same for the bibliographic treatment of OTW. Librarians must rely on the knowledge of the OTW experts, namely the indigenous peoples themselves and the anthropologists. The challenge is the opening of libraries catalogues to metatada not produced by librarians. The point of interoperability is not only to exchange metadata between information environments, but also to combine them in pluralistic and flexible information systems. Typically, the inventories of OTW and of their versions produced by the scholars or by the indigenous experts should not be considered as an external and complementary information source, but as much as possible should be encoded, reused and integrated in library information systems as a specific layer. The FRBR model would offer the generic framework through which the various layers and kinds of metadata could interact. The pending question is whether the fate of the FRBR is just to help the revision of the cataloging rules and formats or to serve as a generic framework for library information systems conceived as modular knowledge bases.

Notes

1. Here, the librarian will wonder: "Am I concerned by this objection ? These quarrels between anthropologists or these indigenous susceptibilities are of no importance for my catalog." On the contrary, I believe that the reference to users, to their needs and tasks (such a frequent reference in the literature on information systems, hence on library catalogs) requires more than just satisfaction surveys. It requires also a firmer knowledge of human cognition, including its social circumstances. If library science is an applied science, cognitive anthropology can help.

2. This condition is necessary but not sufficient. It is not so simple to identify real criteria (necessary and sufficient conditions) for the notion of tradition.

3. FRBR manifestations are abstract objects. Among Group 1 FRBR entities, manifestation is the less poor one because it holds enough information to determine most of physical features of items.

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But the fact that a manifestation encodes physical properties does not imply that it possesses these properties.

4. Available online at <http://www.musicaustralia.org/>.

5. However, in this oral context, one can define the manifestation as the performance event without its strictly spatio-temporal determinations.

6. As an example of such needs, one can imagine an expression-version that groups carvings and texts, resources so different from a semiotic perspective, but often equivalent from the perspective of the story told.

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