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Providing Access to E-Audiobooks:

Help from the Non-Cataloger

KEYWORDS: cataloging; non-musical sound recordings; audiobooks

ABSTRACT

There are a growing number of Web sites that offer free e-audiobooks. Providing access to these e-audiobooks can be a challenge for libraries, particularly with shrinking budgets and staff. The author describes a process created at California State University, San Bernardino to re-record and catalog currently popular public domain e-audiobooks with a goal of making the cataloging simple enough that a non-cataloger can perform the task.

INTRODUCTION

Audiobooks had a 4.7 percent unit sales increase in 2009 with nearly 20 million units being sold.¹ Clearly there is a growing demand for these resources. How can libraries meet this demand in the current economic climate, where shrinking material budgets are the norm? This article describes a process developed at the John M. Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) to provide audiobooks of classic literature to library patrons in spite of having very limited resources. Classic fiction was selected because of its popularity as both academic and recreational reading material as well as so much of it being out of copyright and therefore available for reproduction.

GETTING STARTED

The collection development librarian at the Pfau Library, Lisa Bartle, has had a long-standing interest in audiobooks. She explored many online audiobook sites and created a

research guide for the library describing the best free audiobook sites available.² The Pfau Library's modest audiobook collection has been acquired mainly through gifts to the library. Bartle developed an idea to use free audiobooks from the Web to expand the library's collection of audiobooks using public domain materials.

One particular audiobook Web site, AudioBooksForFree.com, allows only the 8 kbps versions to be downloaded for free and charges for higher quality audio versions. However, the site allows people to purchase all of their MP3 audiobooks loaded on ten DVD discs for a very reasonable price. Knowing that DVDs are not a common way to listen to audio files, and wanting to have a backup copy of the audiobooks in case they were lost during circulation, Bartle thought it would be best if the audiobooks could be re-recorded onto compact discs. Before purchasing the DVDs, she emailed the company to ask permission for the library to copy the individual titles to CDs to loan out. The company agreed, as long as their name and URL be included on the label of each CD. Mounting the digital files would not be allowed.

In fact, Bartle contacted all of the web sites on her research guide to ask permission to burn their audio files to CD. Most of the sites granted permission, but some objected to having the MP3 files burned directly and asked instead that the files be converted to another format before burning them. The reason given for changing the file format was that MP3 files are easier to rip, or copy, the files. Based on this reasoning, and because not all standard CD players can play an MP3 CD, the library decided to burn the AudioBooksForFree files to the standard WAV format.

CREATING THE CDS

To get started, the library purchased blank CD-R compact discs, cases, CD labels, and a stamper to apply the labels onto the blank discs. These supplies were all relatively inexpensive,

particularly if the spindles of blank CDs and cases are bought separately. In consideration of shelving space for these materials, the library decided to use slim-line jewel cases whenever possible. If a single audiobook required more than 2 CDs, then staff would use a standard jewel case into which 3 CDs could fit.

As the DVDs the library had purchased from AudioBooksForFree.com had over 600 titles on them, the titles were prioritized in order of importance. To begin with, the individual MP3 files for a particular title were converted to WAV format using RealPlayer. There are numerous other file format converters available freely on the Internet that can be similarly used. After the WAV file was created, it was burned to the CD. Then, looking at the AudioBooksForFree.com site at the page for that particular title, the collection development librarian created a CD label using information from that page to include on the label. A template for the labels was created using the free software that came with the labels that had been purchased. The labels were printed with the title, author, narrator, duration, abridgement (if applicable), disc number (if more than one), provider URL, and place of publication. This information was needed to create the bibliographic record (more information on this further in the article). This was an iterative process in the beginning, with a back-and-forth dialog between the collection development librarian and the author, the lone cataloging librarian. The earliest batches of labels did not contain playing time, which was needed for the cataloging record, so that was added to later labels. The first set of labels was created with the number of tracks on each CD. That information would have been needed if the CDs had been burned with the MP3 files (necessitating the use of chapter 9 (electronic resources)). However, once it was determined that the cataloging could be done using only chapter 6 (sound recordings), that information was not needed. It was subsequently dropped from later labels. As the process for

cataloging the CDs was developed, it was determined what information was needed for inclusion in the MARC record that could be included on the CD label to speed up the cataloging process.

With a decent speed CD burner and a little practice, creating the CD and the label and applying the label should take 30 minutes or less, depending on the technology and practice. Once the routine was settled, the library determined that the time could be decreased to as little as 10-15 minutes per resource. Many resources have multiple discs which means more time is spent creating the discs, but less time is spent on creating the labels since most of the data from one disc can be used on the next.

CATALOGING DECISIONS

The first decision to be made was what exactly we were going to catalog. Obviously, we wanted to catalog the CDs we were creating. In addition, we considered including a link to the title on the AudioBooksForFree.com Web site on the CD records that were being created. This would allow users to hear a sample of the narrator's voice, an important aspect in listening to audiobooks. A bad narrator, which can be somewhat of a personal preference, can ruin the audiobook experience. It would also allow users to download their own copy of a title (with pricing dependant on the sound quality selected). However, ultimately the library decided to not include a link to the online resources, as we didn't want the additional responsibility of having to maintain the URLs for the online versions.

As the plan on how to catalog these e-audiobooks was developed, these types of newer sound recording formats and how to catalog them was still evolving. In October 2007, the Library of Congress (LC) issued guidelines which addressed some of the descriptive elements, such as General Material Designator [GMD], physical description, and notes of then-emerging

sound recording formats, including MP3s.³ The LC guidelines addressed several media formats and file types, but they did not specifically cover some of the issues we encountered creating locally produced CDs.

In January 2008, OLAC (the Online Audiovisual Catalogers group) released their “Best Practices for Cataloging Streaming Media”.⁴ While the streaming guidelines didn’t specifically apply to what we were doing, they were useful to look at and reinforced the idea of including certain elements. The guidelines recommend not including a 300 field when a resource is available as different versions (e.g. low and high bandwidths) in separate files on the same Web site. This supported the cataloging librarian’s decision to not include a 300 field in the records as the files contained on the CDs were WAV and differed from the MP3 files found online. They also address including a summary and contents notes. The records the library created include summaries where readily available, but there was not enough information available to add contents notes easily.

SOUND RECORDING OR ELECTRONIC RESOURCE?

The digital files available on the AudioBooksForFree.com Web site and the DVDs the library had purchased were MP3 files. Since the definition of MARC Leader/06 “Type of Record” code “m” (Computer file) was revised in 1997 to allow for the significant aspect of the content, rather than the carrier, we knew that MP3s should be cataloged using the sound recordings workform in OCLC, using in this case “type” code “i” for nonmusical sound recording.⁵ LC’s guidelines explain that the GMD should be “[electronic resource]” for MP3s.⁶ MP3s should be cataloged using both chapters 6 and 9 of AACR2 in order to bring out both sound recording and electronic resource aspects of that material type.⁷

However, the CDs the library had created contained WAV files, not MP3s. The cataloging librarian pondered whether the CDs should be cataloged as electronic resources or sound recordings. While CDs containing WAV files can be played in any standard CD player, the CDs had been created using CD-R discs. Was this enough to warrant treating the CD as an electronic resource? The cataloging librarian searched online extensively looking for relevant resources to answer this question. The archives of the AUTOCAT listserv were searched for guidance, but most of the discussion there centered around MP3 CDs.⁸ The cataloging librarian looked at various libraries' online cataloging manuals, articles, PowerPoint presentations—anything that might help answer how to catalog these resources. *Cataloging of Audiovisual Materials and Other Special Materials* ultimately provided clarity on this issue.⁹ Only resources requiring the use of a computer or specialized playback software should be cataloged as an electronic resource. Since the CDs the library had created could be played in any standard CD player, it was determined that the CD-R aspect did not justify treating it as an electronic resource. Therefore, the records were created using the GMD “[sound recording]”. This meant that the CDs could be cataloged using just AACR2 chapter 6 for sound recordings.

REPRODUCTION: TO FOLLOW AACR2 OR THE LCRI?

One of the decisions to be made was whether we should catalog what we had in hand, a reproduction, or, the original audiofiles. To complicate matters further, what would we consider the original version: the online files or the ten DVD set of MP3 files we had paid for? What we had was a reproduction of an MP3 file on DVD made from an online file. AACR2 1.11 states that we should catalog what we have in hand, thereby describing our reproduction and putting any information on the original in a note (MARC tag 534).¹⁰ However, according to LCRI 1.11A, used for non-microform reproductions, catalogers have the option to describe the

original work and put details relating to the reproduction into a single note (MARC tag 533).¹¹ If the library were to follow AACR2, the locally-created CDs would be considered unpublished.

When the collection development librarian had contacted the publisher and asked permission to make individual CDs from the DVDs that had been purchased, the publisher had stipulated that their name/Web address be included on all of the CDs created. If following AACR2, AudioBooksForFree.com would be hidden in a note in the bibliographic record. Believing the publisher would want credit not only on the CDs, but also on any records describing the CDs, the decision was made to follow the LCRI so that the publisher information was more prominent and not buried in a note.

When describing the original manifestation, the library chose to use the online version despite the DVDs being an intermediary format. This decision was made considering that when using a remote electronic resource as the original, the decision to include the physical description area (MARC tag 300) is optional.¹² Therefore, to try to avoid any confusion that might arise from the mention of various file types on the record (MP3 versus WAV), the cataloger chose not to include the physical description.

OCLC CONSTANT DATA TEMPLATE

When this project was initially proposed, the cataloging librarian made it clear that the library's small cataloging staff had little to no time to take on this additional project. The collection development librarian was willing to learn how to catalog the material herself if someone was willing to train her. So right from the beginning, the goal was to simplify the process enough so that a trained "non-cataloger" could do the cataloging. To facilitate this, an OCLC constant data template was created to be used as a starting point. The constant data

contained placeholders for author (MARC tag 100), title including subtitle and statement of responsibility (MARC tag 245), alternate title (MARC tag 246), subject headings (MARC tag 650), and narrator (MARC tag 511). The fixed fields were primarily filled out. The only one that might need to be changed was “Literary Text for Sound Recordings” in the event that a resource needed to be coded something other than fiction, like poetry. The constant data also included the 007, publisher information (MARC tag 260), genre heading (MARC tag 655) for “Audiobooks,” and an added entry for the publisher (MARC tag 710). The 533 note for the reproduction information was included and only needed the duration added.

Since the titles purchased for this project were primarily well-known works of literature, some of the bibliographic information for the work could be copied from records in the Library of Congress’ online catalog. By looking up the titles in LC’s catalog, staff could copy and paste information such as the authorized author’s name into the OCLC template. Subject and genre terms found on the LC records could also be copied and used in the records. If the LC record contained a summary of the title, that was added to the record as well. Library of Congress Classification numbers could also be copied from the LC record. However, at CSUSB, the audiobook collection is shelved in closed stacks using accession numbers so this was not an issue.

MARC FIELDS USED IN THE RECORDS

Fixed Fields Table

007 Physical Description Fixed Field for Sound Recordings

(Required for a sound recording on CD.)

007 s \$b d \$d f \$e u \$f n \$g g \$h n \$i n \$m e \$n d

\$a Category of material — s = Sound recording.

\$b Specific material designation — d = Sound disc.

\$d Speed — f = 1.4 m. per sec.

\$e Configuration of playback channels — u = Unknown.

\$f Groove width/groove pitch — n = Not applicable. Use for CDs

\$g Dimensions — g = 4 ¾ in. (12 cm.) [Standard size CDs]

\$h Tape width — n = Not applicable. Use for CDs.

\$i Tape configuration — n = Not applicable. Use for CDs.

\$k Kind of material — m = Plastic with metal. Use for CDs.

\$m Special playback characteristics — e = Digital recording.

\$n Capture and store techniques — d = Digital storage.

Main and added entry fields

According to AACR2, chapter 6, the main entry (MARC tag 1XX) should be taken from the chief source, usually the first person named in the statement of responsibility.¹³ The form of the name was copied from an alternate version in the Library of Congress' Catalog and the heading was controlled in OCLC. An added entry was also added for the narrator, if known (MARC tag 700) and the publisher, AudiobooksForFree.com (MARC tag 710).

Title field

The title statement should be taken from the chief source of information.¹⁴ Assuming this was the same as the equivalent print version, the title information and statement of responsibility were copied from the print record. Also included in the 245 MARC tag was the GMD, in this case, “[sound recording]”

Edition Field

If applicable, an edition statement was added (MARC tag 250) indicating whether the material was an abridged edition.

Publication Field

Following the LCRI regarding cataloging reproductions, we based our publication information (MARC tag 260) on the original online files, which were on the AudioBooksForeFree.com Web site.¹⁵

Physical Description Field

Because the cataloging was based on the original manifestation, the online files, including a 300 field was not required and would in this case be confusing. The physical description of the reproduction, the CD, was contained in a note (MARC tag 533) as mentioned below.

Note Fields

Generally speaking, only three note fields were needed on the records we created: Performer note, reproduction details, and summary. AACR2 instructs the cataloger to give the names of performers if they are not named in the statement of responsibility and deemed important.¹⁶ Therefore, for resources with a listed narrator, a 511 MARC tag was added with the text “Narrator:” and followed by the narrator’s name. Those resources with unknown narrators had a 500 MARC tag added stating that the narrator was unknown which we also felt was important to include. MARC tag 533 was used to record details about the reproductions we had created. When appropriate, a summary or synopsis of the story was included.

Subject fields

The subject headings were copied from the equivalent print version of the title into the appropriate 6XX MARC tags. A catalog search on those subjects should bring up all applicable

formats. A genre/form term of “Audiobooks” was also added in MARC tag 655 in order to bring up all audiobooks using a subject search.

TRAINING

Training is very important when having a non-cataloger do any cataloging activities. Training for the project took several hours. The first thing covered was basic MARC record tags. A cheat sheet was created explaining some of the more common MARC tags. Searching the Library of Congress’ catalog was the next lesson. Searching was done by title and discussion included how to identify the best record to use as a basis for the description. The longest amount of time was spent learning to use the OCLC Connexion software. Aspects of the training included creating a master record from a template, keystrokes (including creating new subfields and deleting fields), and how to control headings. Training on searching the OCLC authority file was also done so that the non-cataloger could look for possible authorized forms of narrator names if controlling the name was not successful.

After the fundamentals were covered, the next part of the training focused on putting the different pieces together. Essentially this meant learning how to plug in the information from the LC Catalog into the record template in OCLC Connexion. A cataloging checklist was created for the non-cataloger of things to watch out for. The checklist included items like non-English titles or resources known to have multiple languages; multiple authors; editions (including abridgement); and checking for ‘Literary Text’ type.

Many questions from the non-cataloger could be easily answered using email or Skype. Skype has the added advantage in that it allows screen sharing. If the non-cataloger had a question about how to input something into OCLC, for instance, she could share her screen and

the cataloger could view the record and offer assistance in real time. For more in-depth questions or ones which required handling the CD, the two parties would set up a meeting.

REVIEWING THE RECORDS

Once the record was completed, it would be saved to the OCLC online save file, and a printout was created and given to a cataloger along with the CD. A cataloger was able to quickly review the printout and look for any errors or missing information. The cataloger was asked to verify that the information from the CD was accurately reflected on the MARC record printout and that there were not any typos or subfield coding errors. Any corrections that needed to be done were performed by the cataloger on the record saved to the online save file. For non-English or multiple language titles, the cataloger was asked to change and/or add the additional language information in the record. The cataloger was also asked to verify the 'Literary Text' fixed field coding. After making any necessary corrections to the record, the cataloger would update the holdings (officially adding the record to OCLC) and export the record to the local catalog.

There were a couple of things we learned as cataloging staff reviewed the initial records. Initially, the CDs were given to a cataloger with just a save file number on a post-it note. No printouts were included. However, cataloging staff decided that it was easier and faster to review the records using a printout that they could mark on as they verified fields and noted corrections. The decision to create the cataloging checklist for the non-cataloger also stemmed in part from reviewing the records.

PROJECT CONSTRAINTS & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Due to expanded responsibilities added to the collection development librarian's duties, the Pfau Library has put the project of cataloging these e-audiobook CDs on hiatus. However,

with procedures in place, it could easily be renewed as time permits. Given the time gap, refresher training would probably need to be given, but that would likely go quickly.

Future cataloging of these materials may require the use of RDA if it is implemented by the national libraries and subsequently, the Pfau Library. Based on current drafts, RDA will continue the AACR2 policy of describing the reproduction rather than the original.¹⁷ If a Library of Congress Policy Statement similar to LCRI 1.11A is not created to allow description based on the original version than the Pfau Library would need to significantly change its template for cataloging these e-audiobook CDs. Other changes required by RDA would be the elimination of the GMD and the addition of the Content type (336 MARC tag), Media type (337 MARC tag), and Carrier type (338 MARC tag). These additional fields could be put into the template for all e-audiobooks on CD. Recording the dimensions of the CD would also be changed to use centimeters instead of inches as is currently done.¹⁸

The growing popularity of online and downloadable audiobooks also needs to be addressed. While this format might be more desirable to our patrons, high quality audio versions are generally not free and publishers often will not allow libraries to mount purchased high quality versions online. What other options do libraries have?

The procedures developed for this project could be adapted for similar cataloging projects involving either other formats or versions of existing resources. A professional cataloger would need to determine the standards and templates customized to the specific project. However, one recommendation would be to get buy-in from the catalogers first. Most catalogers understandably feel threatened when they feel that someone else is trying to take over their job. Allowing them to review the records gives them a sense of ownership in the process and makes things go smoother.

SUMMARY

Audiobooks have a long history in America's library collections, and while their use continues to grow, especially for those e-audiobooks in the public domain, so does the need to catalog them for library collections. However, there is no single correct way to catalog these public domain e-audiobooks that have been re-recorded on CD. The way any library chooses to catalog them may vary based on which exact details are determined as necessary in describing a given e-audiobook collection and the library's specific needs for providing patrons access to the resources. The Pfau Library has met the challenges of investigating current practices and standards for audiobooks, determining best web resources for downloading public domain e-audiobooks, deciding which medium to use for re-recording, and step-by-step handling of various local and access issues. Once knowledgeable staff reviews national standards and determines specific policies and templates as to what works best locally for cataloging these unique resources, it is clearly possible to assign staff who have very little formal training in cataloging, or who have very little background working with e-audiobooks, to create the records, as the Pfau Library has demonstrated.

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