

# Metadata

Marcia Lei Zeng & Jian Qin

Facet Publishing

London

2008

xvii + 365 pp.

ISBN 978-1-85604-655-8

£39.95

**George Macgregor**

*Information Strategy Group,*

*Information Management & Systems,*

*Liverpool Business School,*

*Liverpool John Moores University*

**Keywords** metadata, digital libraries, cataloguing

Metadata orientated books have been coming thick and fast since the early 2000s such that few students or practitioners are ever likely to experience a dearth of reading. However, with such abundant choice it is becoming increasingly necessary for LIS students to improve their screening processes, lest purchase of a turkey arise. Consideration of the author's credentials is normally a principal means of determining book quality, particularly if one lacks any knowledge of the subject the book purports to be about. *Metadata* certainly benefits from such rudimentary measuring devices as its authors are two of the most well known names in metadata and knowledge organisation. Marcia Lei Zeng is Professor of Library and Information Science at Kent State University sporting a repertoire of scholarly activity almost as lengthy as all four volumes of DDC22. Zeng's specialism is in metadata and knowledge organisation. Co-author Jian Qin has similar research interests and is similarly prolific, holding an associate professorship at the School of Information Studies, Syracuse University.

*Metadata* is described by the authors as a "textbook and an instructional guide", but it is more than that, offering something cataloguers who have found themselves out of the metadata loop for a few years. The book is split into four sections. Section one ('Fundamentals of metadata') briefly summarises basic metadata principles before dedicating more worthwhile space to the current metadata standards. Every major standard is discussed (e.g. DC, MODS and MARC, CDWA, IEEE-LOM, EAD, etc.), as well as rights, multimedia, agent (e.g. FOAF, vCard, etc.), preservation and scientific metadata. Section two ('Metadata building blocks') explores metadata schema structure and semantics, schema syntax and metadata records. This section includes some welcome sub-chapters on application profiles, crosswalks, granularity issues in the metadata creation process, and reusing metadata via metadata packaging standards such as METS. Section three ('Metadata services') discusses the various uses of metadata services and their infrastructure. Discussion of metadata registries, metadata repositories (including a sub-chapter on harvesting models, OAI-PMH, etc.), and metadata quality are a particular focus. Also within section three is a whole chapter dedicated to interoperability, encompassing interoperability strategies as well as schema, metadata record and repository level interoperability issues. The final section is the shortest, summarising the 'metadata research landscape'. A useful and interesting inclusion here is a summary of research pertaining to metadata modelling, metadata architecture, the Semantic Web and collaborative tagging systems. All of the aforementioned sections are ably supplemented by circa 50 pages of appendices. These include an appendix of metadata schema, application profiles and registries and another providing detail of various value encoding schemes and content standards. A comprehensive glossary is also included.

Over recent years there have been numerous books inhabiting the same intellectual space as *Metadata* (e.g. Caplan, 2003; Foulonneau & Riley, 2008; Haynes, 2004; Liu, 2007, etc.). *Metadata* arguably displaces some of these aforementioned monographs for a number of reasons. Firstly, *Metadata* benefits from a relative equilibrium in all things metadata. The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the advent of XML and a spectacular proliferation in metadata standards and the technologies harnessing these standards. This has made writing any book on metadata in recent times problematic as publication schedules invariably fail to keep pace with rapid technical developments. As of 2008 though, the metadata environment has entered a period of relative calm. Standards have developed, matured, stabilised, and in most cases tangible outcomes or services

have emerged as a result. Such maturation is perhaps best exemplified by the huge growth in OAI-compliant repositories since the release of OAI-PMH version 2.0 (Van de Sompel and Lagoze, 2002). *Metadata* is therefore as fresh as daisy and is unlikely to wither and die suddenly, as others have.

Secondly, *Metadata* is an altogether more agreeable proposition for the majority of readers. By assuming a small degree of a posteriori knowledge, the authors essentially compress to a few pages what would ordinarily take a couple of chapters to thrash out. This provides extra scope for content on metadata schema, services and research. That is not to say that *Metadata* is not learner friendly; just that the starting blocks have been moved slightly. Instructional materials are provided at the end of every chapter, with case studies, sample problems and exercises, and hands-on metadata activities featuring throughout. A supplementary 'companion' website and CD-ROM is also available for those instructors wishing to access additional exercises. Finally – and this is related to the previous point – the examples used to describe or analyse metadata concepts are among the best seen in a textbook of this type. Abstract models, conceptual diagrams, worked metadata examples from virtually every major standard (often in a variety of serialisations, e.g. XML, RDF/XML, XHTML, etc.) and XML Schema expertly supplement the prose and often form the focus of discussion.

How often has the predictable cliché, 'It does what it says on the tin', been used? A million? *Metadata* does indeed do exactly what it says on the tin, thus raising our cliché total by one. But it does it better than most others. Let's be clear though, this book is not for the out and out novice; some metadata knowledge is assumed. *Metadata* is therefore more relevant to the university student undertaking advanced metadata modules or for the practicing metadata officer / cataloguer requiring a reference book on recent metadata developments. If you fall into either of these two categories, *Metadata* is thoroughly recommended.

## References

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