

International Interlibrary Loan: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Global resource sharing is an idea whose time has come,¹ and a variety of factors have contributed to the trend. The most important of these factors is the abundance of discovery tools. WorldCat provides access to the holdings of thousands of libraries, and the Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue provides a similar service with, to a certain extent, a different group of libraries. Aside from these mega-catalogs, websites like ShareILL or search engines like Google allow the patron or librarian to zero in on, for example, the online catalog of the Jagiellonian library in Cracow, Poland.

For the ILL practitioner it is a godsend to be able to determine what library or libraries hold that obscure Japanese serial or Russian treatise that a patron needs. On the other hand, that is only half the battle: “ease of discovery belies the difficulty of delivery.”² From the point of view of many librarians, certainly from that of a librarian in the United States, the optimal situation is to find the desired bibliographic record on WorldCat with library holders who supply via OCLC. This scenario insures that the “ease of discovery” is linked to a simple way to initiate ILL requests and to pay any charges that are involved.

My poster child for these WorldCat or OCLC libraries that make international ILL easy for the practitioner is the Bavarian State Library. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek is an outstanding library of nearly ten million volumes, and the decision was made to play a more active role in international sharing. In 2007 the BSB added approximately seven million records to WorldCat, and in March of 2009 they made their OCLC symbol upper case – GEBAY. Between March and December of 2009, 16,000 international requests were received from 25 different countries.³ I can personally attest to the importance of the Bavarian State Library to the University of Notre Dame. Since they went uppercase, we have borrowed more from them than from any other library abroad – more even than from the British Library whom we use a great deal. Of course, how much you borrow and

¹ Linda Frederiksen et al., *Global Resource Sharing*. (Oxford: Chandos, 2012), p.1.

² David P. Atkins, “Going Global,” *Interlending & Document Supply*, 38 (2010), pp. 72-75.

³http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/services/brochures/214251ukc_WC_Resource_Sharing_at_Bavarian_State_Library.pdf.

from whom is all very relative; however, the fact that over the last few years we have borrowed nearly 400 times from the Bavarian State Library and over the same period of time approximately 320 times from the British Library speaks volumes (no pun intended).

Of course, GEBAY and BRI, the Bavarian State Library and the British Library, are hardly the only WorldCat or OCLC libraries that make ILL easy for us. There are other such suppliers in Germany and in Great Britain. Countries like Denmark have ten such libraries, being led by the Royal Library in Copenhagen.⁴ Moreover, as the name WorldCat implies: these libraries are all over the globe. From the University of South Africa to the National Library of Australia, from Waseda University in Tokyo to the National Library of China and Tsinghua University in Beijing. In 2012 there were over 200 libraries in 30 countries that have provided International ILL through OCLC and have expedited that service through IFM.⁵

When I cannot make my interlibrary loan requests through OCLC, then I must visit the website of the library I want to borrow from. The discovery tools may be the same. For example, I may find the bibliographic record of the item I need on OCLC or WorldCat; however, the symbol of the holding library is in lowercase. Pretty much the same situation prevails if I find a good bibliographic record in the Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue – that is, I have found a holder, but I will have to go to the web to find out how to effect a loan or a photocopy. Sometimes it is easier just to skip that step of searching the mega-catalogs and go directly to the website of the library I am quite certain is a holder.

In any case, visiting another library's website in order to figure out how to do an interlibrary loan is always an adventure. Websites vary a great deal; the spectrum runs from websites that are reasonably transparent and easy to use to those which are fiendishly difficult. My example of a good library website and a good library for international ILL transactions is that of the National Library of Spain, the Biblioteca Nacional de España -- <http://www.bne.es/>. It's all very intuitive: when you go to the website, converting the Spanish to English is fairly obvious.

⁴ Helle Brink and Leif Andresen, "Danish libraries in WorldCat – and ordering facilities to ten Danish libraries," *Interlending & Document Supply*, 38 (2010), pp. 147-151.

⁵ Information supplied in personal email by Tony Melvyn, Product Services Consultant, OCLC.

When you glance over your options, “services” and “interlibrary loan” are easy to find on uncluttered web pages. First-time users need to register; once you are registered, you have a username and password. When you login, you have another simple set of options: (1) Submit a new request; (2) Check the progress of your ILL requests; (3) Change your password. If you go directly to the National Library of Spain’s general catalog and you find the bibliographic record of the item you need, it is only a matter of clicking on “Prestamo Interbibliotecario,” or “Interlibrary Loan” if you are using the English interface, and after logging in, the ILL form appears with certain key fields (author, title, year of publication) already populated. This slick website did not occur by happenstance. “Towards the end of 2007 the ILL Service [at the BNE] began a series of improvements focused on customers.”⁶ The national library’s strategic plan emphasized interlibrary loan, and the ILL unit became “committed to offering a better service both to end users and universities and research centres.”⁷ There is an emphasis upon electronic delivery, and payment for international borrowers is with IFLA vouchers.

Another library whose website I have regularly visited is that of the National Library of Russia. Like the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, the website of the NLR in St. Petersburg is easy to convert to English, and it is equally easy to find your way to “services” and to “electronic delivery” and “interlibrary loan.” With regard to scans or photocopies, you need to register with electronic delivery and you must prepay with a credit card or through a bank transfer; for a loan you can use IFLA vouchers. Thus far, the resemblance to the National Library of Spain is fairly close, but that resemblance ends here. The catalog is more difficult to use – there is a general catalog of scanned cards that can be searched only by main entry, author or title, and a variety of more specific catalogs that can be searched more flexibly through a variety of accession points. The problem is that the average ILL practitioner accustomed to WorldCat or a simple Google-type search box may throw up his or her hands in despair upon pondering such catalogs as: Publications in Foreign Languages (1994-2004), Publications in Yiddish, Publications in Russian (1708-1926, 1976-), Books in Armenian (1623-2006),

⁶ Beatriz Albelda and Sonia Abella, “The ILL Service in the Biblioteca Nacional de España,” *Interlending & Document Supply*, 38 (2010), p. 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Books in Georgian (1629-2006), and this is just the beginning, we have not yet considered serials, newspapers, music, maps, etc. More often than not, you must key in your search terms in Cyrillic, and sometimes the interface provides a virtual keyboard, sometimes not, just as, when you drill down into the website, at times you have the option of an English interface, while at other times, this luxury is not available. Turnaround time could be better; for example, an article request goes through various stages: research, cost estimate, awaiting client acknowledgement, awaiting prepayment, and finally, delivery. On occasion payment can be challenging; you may need to set up an account with assist.ru, a kind of Russian PayPal, in order to use your credit card. Delivery varies – on occasion you may need to retrieve your scanned article from a server; at other times you will receive your scan as an email attachment. In short, you can often get what you need, but there are challenges, and you need to have sufficient time and patience to get over the hurdles and work around the obstacles.

The final library whose website I would like to consider is that of the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. I have been fortunate over the years to have received a great deal of help from the BnF in Paris. I have received reproductions of 18th century novels, difficult-to-find musical scores, Vietnamese documents, and many more items; however, I must also say that I struggle mightily when I go to the library's website. An English interface is available, but this English interface is only helpful for introducing the library and its services. When you go to the "catalogue général," you should be prepared to have the help of a French-speaking colleague or to use Google translate or some other web translation tool, since you absolutely must know phrases like: "recherché" for "search" and "acheter une reproduction" for "buy a reproduction."

"Acheter une reproduction" is a new addition to the catalogue. In the past, I would email reproduction@bnf.fr with an explanation of what I needed. Now, when searching the catalogue général, I can click on "buy a reproduction" to initiate my request. However, clicking on "acheter une reproduction" and proceeding from "panier" (basket) to "livraison" (delivery) to "récapitulatif" (summary) to "règlement" (payment) has been a considerable challenge for me. Recently, while purchasing reproductions of a couple of 18th century music scores

when I clicked on “continue” in order to go from step 1 to step 2, from “panier” to “livraison,” I received an error message because I did not check the box indicating that I accepted the BnF’s terms and conditions, and when I tried to go back to the previous screen to correct my omission, the computer would not allow me to do so. I had to close out my order and go back the catalogue général and begin the whole process again. It seems, this situation can occur for various reasons; there is a box where you need to indicate the pages you want copied or scanned. Since in the case described above I was ordering very short musical scores (4 pages, 12 pages) that were out of copyright, I wanted to indicate “all,” but the rather unforgiving form would not accept “all,” and I received an error message. Again, I could not retrace my steps, but rather had to close out and go back to the catalogue and begin again. Finally, after working through the steps and having my credit card information accepted, I was surprised the next day to receive an email from the Bibliotheque Nationale with an attached form. The form was for the credit card information which I had already submitted! Despite all my grappling with the online form, I had to fax my credit card information. In short, it is a difficult website to navigate. Of course, I readily admit that my language skills and computer expertise are not the greatest; nevertheless, considering my three examples of the websites of the national libraries of Spain, Russia, and France, I would have to say that of the BnF is the most challenging.

I would also like to add that everything is relative. If you visit a website only once every six months, you never develop a good feel for where all the important links are located and how to find what you need. Moreover, websites are always changing. How often do you go to your own library’s website and wonder where the web designers have buried that list of subject specialists which you used to find so easily before. Language skills vary; even if you can convert some pages to English, chances are you will encounter other places which must be dealt with in the original language. Even the browser that you are using will have an effect on your experience as you explore another library’s website.

Depending on the nature of the request, when you do not have an OCLC supplier, at times it is possible to avoid the problems you occasionally encounter when going directly to another library’s website. For example, if I have a request for an

article in Chinese, and I cannot find any WorldCat or OCLC suppliers, I would go to the East Asian Gateway Service that is run by the U. of Pittsburgh:

<http://www.library.pitt.edu/libraries/eal/Gateway-Home.htm>

This service has a partnership with sixteen academic and research libraries in the People's Republic, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The request form is simple and easy-to-use. If you cannot find the serial in a North American library, submit the form to the East Asian Gateway Service, and staff there will search the holdings of such libraries as: Beijing Daxue, Fudan Daxue, Shanghai Jiaotong Daxue, Sichuan Daxue, and others. Since the service is federally funded, one of the added bonuses of this feature is that it is free for individual researchers and for non-profit organizations. Articles are delivered electronically, and the turn-around time is relatively good, approximately a week.

By the same token, if I have a request for a Japanese book or article and if I have no OCLC or WorldCat suppliers, I would take advantage of the Global ILL Framework (GIF) program or consortium. To use GIF you need to register and become a member, but that is a relatively simple procedure. Go to the main website on the internet:

<http://guides.nccjapan.org/content.php?pid=190477&sid=1601139>

and click on and fill out the registration form you find there. Your registration will allow you to submit requests to Japanese libraries which are normally outside the OCLC WorldCat scope, and of course, you are obliged to supply articles to GIF member libraries in Japan. With regard to books both North American and Japanese libraries have the option on the registration form to say yes or no to the lending of books. Charging is up to you, you can work out reciprocal agreements, or you can charge your usual fees for international ILL, and thankfully, charges are done through IFM, so there are no problems with currency conversion or invoices. The mission of GIF is to support access to Japanese materials through ILL and

document delivery,⁸ and ILL staff at any academic library which supports programs in Japanese language and literature would be wise to register.

For the most part, Japanese academic libraries use NACSIS-ILL rather than OCLC for interlibrary transactions, and CiNii Books functions as the union catalog rather than WorldCat. The Global ILL Framework or GIF facilitates the way these two different systems work together through ISO-ILL. Perhaps the best way to illustrate is to use a concrete example or two. One of our faculty at Notre Dame needed a couple of articles that appeared in the Japanese serials **Kingu** and **Shukan shincho** in the 1950's. A number of North American libraries have runs of these serials; however, none of them had the years I needed. So the next step in order to use GIF was to go to the Japanese version of WorldCat, CiNii Books, and see who had what I needed. You can find a link to CiNii books on the GIF homepage mentioned above or simply go to:

<http://ci.nii.ac.jp/books/?l=en>

Use the “advanced search” so that you have plenty of options such as searching the ISSN number, but if you do not have an ISSN, you can cut and paste the Japanese title from a WorldCat record after you click on “Show non-Roman characters” or you can use a transliteration; of course, the more specific your search the better. After you get a Japanese bibliographic record with a list of library holders, the default is for “any libraries” and you want to go to the drop-down menu and choose “Available via Japan and US/Canada ILL” – these will be the GIF libraries. In the case of my examples of articles from the 1950's from the Japanese serials **Kingu** and **Shukan shincho**, Kansai University Library in Osaka appeared to have what I needed. If you click on Kansai you get such details as: fax numbers, charge policy, and OCLC symbol. The latter is what I was most interested in: the symbol for Kansai U. Library is YH@. This is all the information I really needed; now I could go to my ILL requests, find the OCLC WorldCat records for **Kingu** and **Shukan shincho**, and even though Kansai is not listed as a holder, I could put in their YH@ symbol, and eventually get the articles requested.

⁸ Amy R. Paulus, “North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources,” *Interlending & Document Supply*, 41 (2013), p. 38.

If there is no record in OCLC WorldCat, the job is a little more difficult, but it is manageable enough. When you find the bibliographic record in CiNii Books, you will want to copy and paste title, author, and so forth into a blank OCLC ILL form. It is always wise to copy and paste the link of the record from the CiNii catalog into a borrowing note. At the time of this writing there were 161 libraries in Japan participating in GIF, and 89 out of the 161 were willing to lend books.⁹ In order to determine who will lend books, you need to look closely at the information provided when you click on the library holder in the CiNii catalog. In the information under the Japanese library, look for “loan period,” “loan renewal,” “loan charge,” etc.; if there is information provided, such as 28 days under loan period, you have found a lender, while N/A suggests that the library only scans articles. It is not a difficult system to use, although for the first attempt or two, it is great to have an East Asian librarian to help you search the CiNii catalog, which initially can be a little intimidating. Ultimately, the “GIF program is an excellent example of interlibrary loan at its finest.”¹⁰ As one satisfied participant in GIF has noted; it is as if the “door to a whole universe of knowledge and scholarship has been thrown wide open.”¹¹

The last scenario I will touch upon is the situation when the library website does not readily yield any information on interlibrary loan. For example, I had occasion to need a couple of pages from a treatise published in Caracas, Venezuela. I was unable to find any holders except for the National Library of Venezuela, so I consulted the website:

http://www.bnv.gob.ve/consul_linea_bd.php?sw=5&f=31

This is a Spanish-only website; however, after consulting with the Latin American Studies librarian at Notre Dame and after using the web translation tools, I settled upon “Reproducción” where I found a form and an email address:

referencia@bnv.gob.ve. But after filling out the form and sending the email, I

⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

¹¹ Mary E. Jackson, “Expanding Global Resource Sharing: The North American Perspective on the Global ILL Framework (GIF) Initiative,” *Daigaku toshokan kenkyu*, 67 (2003), p. 14.

received no response. I searched the website for another promising email address, sent another email, but once again, with no success.

I had a somewhat similar experience when a patron submitted a request for a 17th c. treatise entitled **Vocabulario de Antonio**. The only holder I was able to find was the National Library of Mexico. Of course, I knew that our only hope was a scan of this treatise, so I accordingly went to the website:

<http://bnm.unam.mx/>

As with that of Venezuela, it is a Spanish-only website, but once again it is simple enough to explore the web page with the help of the web translation tools and/or with the help of a Spanish-speaking colleague. I found nothing specific on interlibrary loan, but the section entitled “Reprografia” or reproductions looked promising; however upon closer inspection, I was unable to find a way to submit a request. It appeared to me that one had to be physically present to make such a request. Finally, I submitted my question by email to “referencia,” and about a week later I received a reply. The reply suggested that my request was feasible; however, the process was an involved one: (1) I needed to write a letter to the Coordinator of the National Library of Mexico, specifying the nature of the research, a full reference to the material requested, the use that would be made of the reprographics, and the digital format required, all of which needed to be on official letterhead stationary; (2) I also needed a commitment letter on the part of the department supporting the research as well as a photocopy of official identification (passport in the case of foreign researchers), once again on official letterhead stationary. After these letters were submitted, I would get an invoice as well as the name of the bank and the number of the bank account in which the payment was to be deposited. Finally, when payment was made, I would need to email the administrative department of the national library attaching a scan of the proof of payment, and only then would digitization begin. I discussed this situation with the graduate student patron, and ultimately, we decided to do without **Vocabulario de Antonio**.

I have taken an informal poll of my interlibrary loan colleagues, and our Latin American subject specialist at Notre Dame conducted a similar poll of

bibliographers around the country, and I have come to the conclusion that my experience is not unique. My conclusions are as follows: it is often difficult to find an interlibrary loan contact on many of these webpages, and email requests to “referencia” or “reproducción” sometimes go unanswered. It may be better to deal with academic libraries rather than national libraries, and by all means use a trackable and insured method of shipping when doing lending or when returning a title you were fortunate enough to borrow. Another recommendation was not to forget or discount such helpful websites as: the Digital Librarian’s guide to Latin American Resources and the union catalog of Latin American digital repositories.¹²

In conclusion, international interlibrary loan is improving, but there is still a long way to go before true global resource sharing is realized. Every one of us can contribute to this improvement. If we are not involved in organized efforts on big digitization projects or such problematic issues as copyright, we can at least support as liberal an international ILL policy as possible in our own library. And if we are not in a position to weigh in on the formulation of policy, we can always answer that email from a library abroad as promptly and as generously as possible.

¹² The “Digital Librarian’s” website is: <http://www.digital-librarian.com/latinamerican.html> and the website of digital repositories url is: <http://repositorioslatinoamericanos.uchile.cl/>.