

**'This small one shall be great':  
NNL10 – from local authority database to national (and international)  
powerhouse**

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**Abstract:**

*Over the past decade the National Library of Israel's local authority database has transformed from a set of language and culture specific files closely curated by a handful of librarians into a vibrant national community in which metadata is created in collaboration between librarians, creative agents, and the public at large. Foundations are being laid in the database for a future linked data platform and the metadata is being made freely available to developers and to Wikimedia. The multilingual and multiscrypt authority file is also serving as inspiration for the development of a collaborative platform within the popular Alma ILS.*

**Keywords:** authority control, cooperative cataloguing, multilingualism, National Library of Israel, Ex Libris.

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Israel is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society in which no single mother tongue is spoken by an absolute majority (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The relative majority speak Hebrew and Hebrew is the official language of the country, with Arabic granted special status (Knesset, 2018). Over 90% of legal deposit materials are in Hebrew, with fewer than 4% of materials being published in English and fewer than 3% in Arabic. Nearly 15% of legal deposit materials are translations from other languages (National Library of Israel, 2019) and academic libraries also acquire considerable amounts of materials from abroad, primarily in English.

The multiplicity of languages in which resources are written, combined with the multiplicity of languages spoken in Israel and the Israeli tradition of creating cataloguing records in four languages (Hebrew for resources using the Hebrew alphabet, including Yiddish, Ladino, and Judeo-Arabic; Arabic for resources using the Arabic alphabet, including Persian and older Turkish; Russian for resources using the Cyrillic alphabet; and English for all other languages) could create a situation in which patrons, searching for all the resources with





Community Zone, updated every six hours. This availability means that any Alma library may choose NNL10 as their preferred authority provider, be they a member of NNL10 or not.

Support is not, as a rule, offered to non-member libraries which choose to use NNL10 as their authority source, though they are periodically reminded that they may join and receive all the benefits of membership, including training in authority work, MARC encoding, and multilingual databases. Members receive expedited support from NLI authority librarians and regular mailings about changes to authority records which may require manual bibliographic file maintenance in their local catalogues.

For the most part, communication between partners and NLI is informal; line cataloguers at member institutions are invited to contact NLI managers directly by phone, email, WhatsApp, or social media. The partners have an annual formal meeting for updates from NLI about the database and to provide feedback on questions of policy and future direction. All requests for additional services are considered, but in the end NLI has the sole power to set policy and decide on development priorities.



*Fig. 3: Tweet from Bar Ilan librarian David Gordon asking whether the Hebrew term for the subject Tomboys is outdated. Following the tweet, the Hebrew term was updated to a more currently acceptable term.*

One of the major decisions NLI makes is when to introduce new scripts into the various types of authority records. It is important for libraries dealing with multiple cultural communities to show cultural sensitivity and NNL10 policies are designed to maximize standardization while being respectful of our national heritage. Since English is the language of cataloguing in many countries, the latin character strings in authority records generally follow Program for Cooperative Cataloging/Name Authority Cooperative Program (PCC/NACO) rules (Program for Cooperative Cataloging, 2018). Arabic and Russian are used in fewer catalogues and so PCC/NACO rules are followed less closely. Hebrew is the language of cataloguing only in Israel and so NNL10 is free to maximize the level of cultural sensitivity to suit the culture of Israeli and of diaspora Jews. Thus, for example, the base assumption for Hebrew NNL10 policy is that conflicts are to be predicted and not merely resolved once discovered. A high percentage of the Israeli Jewish population will, at some point, publish a resource which will be acquired by a library and, due to cultural naming conventions within Jewish communities, there are frequent instances of two or more people bearing the same name. All identified agents are to have authority files created for them in NNL10 and all common names disambiguated, even if there is only one such person within the database. Partner libraries are warned that, should they decide not to create authority files for all agents in bibliographic

records, NLI takes no responsibility should an unlinked agent end up linked to an authority record created by a different library to represent a different agent with the same name. Thus encouraged, the 20 NNL10 libraries create hundreds of authority records a day.

Catalogers are asked to be creative in uncovering information for the authority records. After exhausting the information in the resource in hand, catalogers are encouraged to search the internet, particularly social media for living people and gravestone websites for those dead. In addition cataloguers are urged to use their creativity to obtain information needed for current and future disambiguation, including contacting the agent to discuss the contents of the authority record (Gross & Fox, 2019). Because Israelis, both Jewish and Arab, form strongly connected interpersonal cultures in which individuals (including librarians) have large and overlapping acquaintance networks, it is relatively easy to find ways to contact Israeli agents for more information; if one's own personal networks fail, other librarians or even patrons can be called upon to help in the search. In addition, since Israel is both an egalitarian, low power-distance country (Hofstede, 2016), and has a culture in which books are an important component, authors and other creative agents frequently contact libraries with questions about the way their publications are catalogued. Authority librarians take advantage of this contact to solicit information directly from the source and then ask the creative agents to review their authority information as it appears in public catalogues. Members of the public also submit information and requests for clarification, disambiguation, and changes through online forms, email, and even social media.

The public also weighs in on terminology used within NNL10. In the past, towns on the post-1967 side of the Green Line were qualified, in both Hebrew and English, as being on the West Bank. After a public outcry, NLI changed the Hebrew qualifier to "Judea and Samaria" while leaving the English in conformance with PCC policy; Arabic place names were added so that all populations were served. The usefulness of Arabic headings was soon obvious and after a strategic decision by NLI a translation project was undertaken; at present over 250,000 topical terms and 60,000 geographic names in Arabic have joined the 1.1 million personal name and 3500 corporate/meeting name authorities with an Arabic heading.

Beyond serving the current needs of librarians and the public, NLI's development plans for NNL10 include preparation for linked data. The base structure of NNL10 is a step in the correct direction; hand-curating the connection between various forms of names provides more reliable clustering than can be achieved by algorithm. Above the manual clustering Israeli authority librarians add identifiers from various sources to the authority records – VIAF, Library of Congress control numbers, the Bibliography of the Hebrew Book, and Society of Authors, Composers and Music Publishers in Israel numbers are standard features in NNL10 records. In an attempt to improve clustering of our Chinese, Japanese, and Korean name authority records within VIAF, a partner library's suggestion for adding identifiers from national libraries in those countries was recently implemented and we are awaiting sufficient data to judge whether this is a pilot we would like to expand.

Recently, as part of the effort to establish a national current research information system (CRIS), partner libraries have made a concerted effort to get university researchers to register for Open Researcher and Contributor Identifiers (ORCID) and have recorded the ID in the researcher's authority file. This project has also led to a partnership with the library of the Szold Institute, the national institute for research in the behavioural sciences.

A limitation of NNL10 is its base within Ex Libris products. NLI is exploring ways to release the database to developers. XML files containing name and geographic authority records which include Hebrew headings have been released under a CC0 license on the NLI website (<http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/infochannels/librarians/National-Authority-File/Pages/default.aspx>). Thanks to a grant from Yad HaNadiv, a Rothschild family foundation, NLI will be attempting to port the entire national name authority database to Wikidata and to periodically harvest Wikidata to enrich the siloed authority database with contributions made by Wikipedians.

NLI has also recently renewed an old collaboration with Ex Libris, which was founded in Israel over thirty years ago. Though NNL10 can be viewed in the Alma Community Zone and bibliographic records can be linked directly to the database's authority records, no contribution mechanism currently exists within the Community Zone. As libraries transitioned from Aleph to Alma, NLI had to provide a copy of NLI's Aleph installation to partners so they could continue to contribute metadata.

In the spring of 2019 a crisis point was reached when NLI itself began to make the move to Alma. Would each NLI maintain an Aleph server for authority work by partners? Would NLI cataloguers work, as partner libraries do, in Alma for bibliographic records and Aleph for authorities? This, it was decided, was too unwieldy a workflow to be sustained. All NLI cataloguers do authority work and the nature of legal deposit materials means that the vast majority of new name and subject authority records are created by NLI librarians. The simplest answer would be to take advantage of the one permitted local authority database available to any Alma library and make NNL10 once again the property of NLI alone, but there was no turning back time; a way to manage an authority database with 20 partners within the Alma Community Zone was required.

During the second and thirds quarter of 2019 NLI, Haifa University, and Ex Libris have been working to develop a robust contribution mechanism within the Community Zone which will support multiple contributing libraries and multiple scripts while still providing the expected functionality of a shared authority file such as linkage between the central authority file and local bibliographic records and automatic file maintenance. When the project is successfully completed the solution can be exported to other communities which wish to create cooperative metadata without running an external program. The close working ties being forged between NLI and Ex Libris product teams are being expanding to projects beyond the Alma migration, with one partner bringing its expertise in collaboratively creating metadata and the other its expertise in creating programs to store and display the metadata.

Ten years ago we could not have envisioned how NNL10 would develop nor how well the developing database would mesh with the direction in which authority and identity management would move. Though we have hopes and dreams for the way in which NNL10 will function in 2030, it seems safe to say that it will be performing functions beyond anything we can imagine today. The work that we are doing to collaborate with librarians, the public, and developers in the creation of metadata and our efforts to make our metadata available in places and forms that serve our patrons and the wider information community is exciting. We look forward with great anticipation to the continuing evolution of NNL10 and to expanding the boundaries of library authority control.

