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The Italian Translation of RDA

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ABSTRACT

The first online version of the Italian translation of RDA, *Resource Description and Access*, the new standard for metadata and resource discovery in the digital age, was published in November 2015, on the website of ICCU (Technical Working Group for RDA translation 2015). The translation was published on the RDA Toolkit on March 8, 2016. The translation aims to promote the guidelines in Italy and is the result of one and a half years of work. The Italian Translation Working Group (Gruppo di lavoro tecnico per la traduzione dello standard RDA)¹ worked by email and through periodic meetings, and met also with ICCU to check the whole translation and to discuss single difficult questions. The process of organization of the translation and language translation issues is discussed. Italian translation work was also a valuable opportunity to work with the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) for Development of RDA to contribute to updating the online text and to the ongoing debate, including determining some revisions in the text.

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RDA in translation; RDA in Italian; *Resource Description and Access*; ICCU

The beginnings

The Italian translation of the international standard RDA, *Resource Description and Access*, began before any official act during the summer of 2013. The Italian Translation Working Group,² informally selected by Italy's General Directorate for Library Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright on August 23, 2013, officially was appointed in October 2013. On March 31, 2014, ICCU (Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information) reached an agreement with the ALA (American Library Association) on the translation rights for RDA. Immediately afterward, Italy's General Directorate for Library Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright (Director-General Rossana Rummo) appointed a coordinating committee to translate the rules and officially entrusted ICCU to establish a Technical Working Group (the Italian Translation Working Group) to carry out the translation operational activities.³ The

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translation was completed in June 2015 and published in a PDF version on the ICCU website in November (Technical Working Group for RDA translation 2015).⁴

As a first step, the group shared a preliminary set of rules in order to translate some wording, idiomatic expressions, verb phrases and other standard phrases, and substantive terms in the original English text into Italian. The set of shared rules and terms turned out to be fundamental for several reasons:

- 1) It provided work consistency among the translators
- 2) It helped identify major issues that would need to be resolved during translation
- 3) It included essential new terms and concepts that the cataloging world was addressing.

A corpus of shared rules and terms

This first set of shared rules stems from a translation done in August and September 2013 of the RDA Glossary. In fact, this is the part of the RDA text that was first required to start the translation. It was essential that the translation of the glossary definitions was as exact and definitive as possible, because it would be used by all the translators.⁵ Furthermore, wordings, phrases, and substantive terms—sometimes not easy to understand in depth and often not easy to translate into Italian—recur in both the glossary and the RDA text. The translation choices for the glossary made up the first set of shared rules for the translation work.

To reach more consistency, rules were established to translate adverbs and articles as follows:

Adverbs: When in the original text an adverb is at the beginning of the sentence, always translate it in the same way (–ly = -mente) and put it at the beginning of the sentence. For example: (original) Usually found as “closed captions” = (translation) Solitamente si trovano come “didascalie nascoste.”

Use of definite article: 1) Use the definite article to point out a given occurrence (and only that). For example: (original) Chronological designation of first issue or part of sequence = (translation) Designazione cronologica dell'ultimo fascicolo o parte della sequenza. 2) Do not use the definite article at the beginning of a definition. For example: (original) Encoded bitrate: The speed at which ... = (translation) Velocità di ... [not: *La* velocità di...]. 3) In a list, do not repeat the indefinite article before every noun following the first one, even if they do not agree in gender. For example: (original) assembled by a person, family, or corporate body = (translation) raccolta da una persona, famiglia o ente.

In addition, a correspondence table between English and Italian for recurring terms and expressions was prepared. For example:

additional evidence	dati aggiuntivi
additional instructions	istruzioni aggiuntive
as applicable	se applicabile/se applicabili
as appropriate	come appropriato
as instructed at	come da istruzioni in
ascertainable	accertabile
...	...

A second set of translations that needed a great deal of attention to reach consistency was the repeated instruction phrases. For these phrases, translation had to be clear and accurate from a linguistic viewpoint and uniform throughout the text. This called for adjustments from the English to make the resulting instruction better understood in Italian. Examples include:

“Apply guidelines at” translated as “Si applicano le linee guida contenute,” which is not a word-for-word translation, but expresses the instruction in a way that is clearer in Italian; or

“Choosing preferred names for families” translated as “Scelta dei nomi preferiti per famiglie,” which translates the English gerund with an Italian noun, which was a general rule;

or

the translation of “If there is” as “Se si ha,” which provided the systematic use of the impersonal form.

Major issues

Starting the translation work from the Glossary had, as an additional purpose, the identification of some of the main problems that would need to be addressed during the translation. An important characteristic of the Glossary is that it gathers together more than 800 entries whose definitions are also present and identical in the text of the RDA guidelines. For example, when the RDA guidelines first mention the element *Title of the work*, its definition in the text of RDA is given; everywhere it appears in the text, it has an interactive link that connects to the glossary entry and definition. This feature is spread over the entire text of RDA. In fact, RDA is designed to be used in its electronic version, and for this reason, many rules—such as the definitions from the Glossary—are repeated, often with the same words and phrases. This issue is relevant for consistency in translation.

A few months passed between the beginning of the translation of the Glossary and the distribution of the set of rules to the translators. During that time, the number of terms in the Glossary showed a 10% growth. It became clear, during this period, that the RDA text was *fluid*, continuously changing. Obviously, the majority of the changes were made during the first years of publication of the guidelines. However, that the text would be changing during the estimated months needed both to do the translation and to upload it to the Toolkit was evident.

To choose which version of the text to translate was a difficult problem. Several months passed between the decision to do a translation and the official beginning of the work, and later from the start of the work to its conclusion, and from the conclusion to the upload in the RDA Toolkit. To work with a text that is continuously developing, fixing a date of reference became essential. The choice was the April 2014 edition (a text considerably modified afterward).

Finally, a major problem arose with the examples. This problem was found after the translation of the glossary, starting with the translation of a sample chapter. In the case of nouns, such as “Parliament,” found in examples, the question arose whether to leave them in English or in the original language, as found in the English version of RDA, or to translate them into Italian. To translate examples, the word-for-word understanding of the English text is not enough. A full understanding is required of not only the deep meaning of the content of the specific instruction, but also its context as part of a set of rules crossing the standard as a whole. The answer is not at all predictable. Even the choices made by the German and the French translations that were available during much of our work, and, at the end of 2014, the Spanish translation, disagreed several times. A concrete difficulty in maintaining an overall comprehension of RDA philosophy is clearly evident. The Italian Translation Working Group discussed differences among available translations and agreed that the Italian translation should be based exclusively on a full understanding of the original English text. Right from the beginning, the translation work turned out to require a significant effort, if we consider the size of the text to translate: more than 1,200 pages in the 2011 printed edition.

New terms and concepts

The glossary and the text contain groups of terms that, as a whole, give some important clues on the key issues in the translations. In RDA there are a lot of terms that introduce new concepts from the IFLA conceptual models. This is certainly the most important and crucial set, both for translation difficulties and for the cultural importance that the translation of new terms (and, therefore, of new concepts) inevitably implies in the disciplinary context of the target language.

Some terms, just partly new, attest to an evolution in RDA that builds on International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) and Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR).⁶ The development helped bring about changes—especially for issues such as content versus carrier, a new way of looking at seriality, and access points for works (not uniform titles). These were part of the International Conference on the Principles and Future of AACR, Toronto, 1997⁷—which also impacted International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD)⁸ and International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) communities. For example the terms, concerning “content type”—cartographic content (*contenuto cartografico*), choreographic content (*contenuto coreografico*), content of accessibility (*contenuto accessibile*), color content (*colorazione*), illustrative content (*contenuto illustrativo*),

sound content (*contenuto sonoro*), etc.—reflect a deep theoretical elaboration. In any case, the introduction of new terms points out that we are dealing with a new context for cataloging, different from the traditional one. Approaches to other new terms are described below in different sets.

Terms relating to kind of resources

The first set contains terms relative to the different types of resources; for example: painting (*dipinto*), coat of arms (*stemma*), coin (*moneta*), oil paint (*pittura a olio*), flash card (*scheda didattica*), collage (*collage*), diorama (*diorama*), medal (*medaglia*), radiography (*radiografia*), remote sensing image (*immagine di telerilevamento*), etc. From this set of examples it becomes clear that one of RDA's main objectives is to include resources typically not bibliographic but having major importance for the research needs of users. The first translation problem here was to identify the exact Italian equivalent term; for example the difficult case to translate terms for some unusual resources, such as *flash card* or *remote sensing image*.

Technical terms beyond “book” terminology

Another set contains terms to record different carrier types and their technical characteristics; there are terms to record both base materials (underlying physical material of a resource)—for example, shellac (*gommalacca*), bristol board (*cartoncino bristol*), canvas (*tela*), cardboard (*cartone*), ceramic (*ceramica*), ivory (*avorio*), glass (*vetro*), leather (*cuoio*), metal (*metallo*)—and the applied materials as ink (*inchiostro*), dye (*tintura*), acrylic paint (*pittura acrilica*), chalk (*gesso*), charcoal (*carboncino*), graphite (*grafite*). Distinguishing between the concepts of “base material” and “applied material” is indicative of a shift away from the view of the printed book as the principal object of registration and access. In fact, several statements and terms, always within the “technical” range, set out the production method (RDA 3.9)—for example, blueline (*eliografia*), blueprint (*cianografia*), carbon copy (*copia carbone*), collotype (*collotipia*), daguerreotype (*dagherrotipo*), embossed (*goffratura*), engraving (*incisione*), and others, and the generation of audio recordings, digital resources, microforms, and videotapes (RDA 3.10). On this subject, we must point out that RDA is far away from systematically covering all the objects of interest for cultural institutions: for example there are no references to sculpture (e.g., carving or fusion), or weaving (or knitting, pillow-lace, etc.) as production methods, but museums have plenty of objects created using these methods. Nevertheless, the translation of these terms, due to their belonging to specific “extra-bibliographic” fields, involved experts in different sectors of arts and industry.

New cataloging terms

A new vision of cataloging is the basis of RDA. This is reflected by the presence of many new terms and concepts, among which a few were particularly difficult to

translate, for example: unit of extent, access point, other title information, and comprehensive description.

Unit of extent

The first example is the expression *unit of extent*, whose translation gave us some difficulty because it is different from the element *dimensions*. According to RDA 3.4.1.1, “Extent is the number and type of units and/or subunits making up a resource” while “Dimensions are the measurements of the carrier or carriers and/or the container of a resource. Dimensions include measurements of height, width, depth, length, gauge, and diameter” (RDA 3.5.1.1).

Examples of *unit of extent* are the number of volumes, of audiocassettes, of slides, of audiotape or film reels, of CD-ROMs, and so forth, which make up a resource. It was impossible to translate this expression as the centimeters of the spine or the pages of a book using the Italian *unità di misura*. This was both because *unità di misura* in Italian refers to an exact idea (centimeters, liters, kilos, etc.) and because *unità di misura* has a matching English translation, *unit of measurement*, that is different from *unit of extent*. Furthermore, among the possible notes, we find a “Note on dimensions of item/manifestation” and a “Note on extent of item/manifestation.” The translation resulted in *unità di estensione*, a completely new term in Italian cataloging language.

Access point

The translation of *access point* is a second example, surely with momentous consequences. *Access point* does not pose translation problems. It is translated as “*punto d’accesso*” (and it has also cross-references to *punto d’accesso autorizzato* and *punto d’accesso variante*). The interest from the viewpoint of the content is in the definition. Point of access is no longer “A name, term, code, etc., through which bibliographic or authority data is searched and *identified*,” following the definition of the International Cataloguing Principles. However, in RDA, it is “a name, term, code, etc., representing a specific work or expression” (RDA 5.1.4). The comparison between the two different definitions emphasizes that the verb *to represent* in RDA is used for the verbs *to search* and *to identify* found in ICP. From a linguistic point of view, this difference could be considered minor, but the use of this formulation hides a completely different and innovative point of view. In Italian, there are corresponding terms for *to identify* (*identificare*) and *to represent* (*rappresentare*); in this case, the translation issue is to identify, respect, and underscore this relevant conceptual change.

Entry

RDA moves away from the concept of “entry” (the name “under which” a (physical) bibliographic object is searched) to the concept of attributes, which—as a

whole—“are for” an entity. They represent or they are a *symbol* of it. Maybe we can dare to translate *to represent* with *to symbolize* or *to signify*, used in their linguistic meaning. Access points are doors to the entities, and they work only if the language defining authorized and controlled access points is understood by the users. In the past, the focus was on *artificial* languages. Today, after ICP, the focus is on *users’* languages.

Other title information

Another example of the terminological innovations required is the translation of the data element *other title information*; the definition of this element is “information that appears in conjunction with, and is subordinate to, the title proper of a resource. Other title information can include any phrase appearing with a title proper that is indicative of: the character, contents, etc., of the resource or the motives for, or occasion of, its production, publication, etc.” (RDA 2.3.4.1)⁹ The nature of this element not only gives complete information on the title but also gives many other different kinds of information. Thus, it was necessary to break with the traditional Italian label “complemento del titolo” and return to the original label “altre informazioni sul titolo,” closer to the English text and to its real content.

Comprehensive description

Comprehensive description—a very difficult phrase to translate—is another example of the need to find innovative solutions. The term *comprehensive* can be translated in Italian with both the term *comprensivo* and the term *complessivo*. The difficulty is translating the concept that is found in the RDA term definition (RDA 1.5.2):

A comprehensive description is used to describe the resource as a whole. It can be used to describe any of the following types of resources:

- a) a resource issued as a single unit (e.g., a single audio disc, a PDF document);
- b) a multipart monograph (e.g., three videocassettes issued as a set, a kit consisting of a digital videodisc, a model, and an instruction booklet);
- c) a serial (e.g., a magazine published in monthly issues, an online journal);
- d) an integrating resource (e.g., an updating loose-leaf, a website that is updated on a periodic basis);
- e) a collection of two or more units assembled by a private collector, a dealer, a library, an archive, etc. (e.g., a private collection of printed theatre programs, a database of digital images compiled by a museum, an archive of personal papers).

In the beginning, the translation “descrizione comprensiva” was chosen, then it was changed to “descrizione complessiva.” However, thanks to Barbara Tillet’s

suggestion, “descrizione comprensiva” was finally used because it covers the resources as a whole (regardless of its particular nature).¹⁰

Structure of the translation process

The translating process was structured into three different stages:

1. First translation: creating an initial draft in Italian. The translators had to respect the rules initially set up by the Translation Working Group and based on the preliminary translation of the Glossary so the draft would show some internal coherence, even though it was made by more than twenty persons at once.
2. Accurate proofreading: providing checks of the drafts. In this stage, two persons simultaneously read the English text and the Italian draft checking different aspects: (a) the accurate translation of the original English text—to capture both conceptual and terminological aspects of the guidelines (not always clear at a first glance); (b) the real correspondence of the text translated by each translator to the set of rules and the coherence of the section being checked with the rest of the text, as it grew more accurate during the second stage.
3. General rereading: performing an overall revision and systematic check of the correspondence between the original linguistic formulas and the formulas chosen for the translation. In this third stage, a general check on the translation quality and on the fluency of the Italian text was also carried out. This last check had, first of all, the aim to stay close to the original text (an especially important condition because of the “fluidity” of the RDA text), but, at the same time, to offer an accurate and clear Italian version.

The translation was completed in September 2015. From that moment on, ICCU in alliance with ALA, the American publisher, started the editorial work for the publication. Under the arrangements between ICCU and ALA to promote the dissemination of the guidelines in Italy, the first version of the Italian translation was published in a PDF format on the ICCU website. The publication of the translation in the RDA Toolkit was scheduled for 2016. From October 2013 to 2016 may seem a long time, but the text was huge, and this translation was really the best possible result, maybe even beyond all reasonable expectations.

Conclusion

At many points in RDA, we had to translate a text that stems from innovation rather than tradition, and, therefore, use neologisms more than consolidated traditional terms. Furthermore, while ISBD as a standard is the result of an analysis and of a consequent formalization of worldwide widespread cataloging practice, RDA is born from both the meeting of the cataloging world and the web. It is based on internationally agreed principles and conceptual models and also makes every effort to be compliant and to dialogue with the web on a terminological plane.

A key effort in this direction is the RDA aim to be a content standard—giving instruction to identify resources but not to display or to code the identifying data produced using the guidelines. This is a major departure from the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*. For this reason, RDA uses both ISBD to give examples of the display of structured descriptions—when recording relationships between entities (see RDA sections 24–28)—and MARC coding, to give examples of records made following the RDA guidelines (see RDA examples in the Toolkit). The translation showed that it was necessary, by hard conceptual work, to define whether the term in a chapter or section was used in its traditional meaning or in a meaning that is partly or completely new. It was essential to avoid simply translating the text with terms that merely sound assonant and familiar to the Italian cataloger, so as not to deprive the original text of its—real or attempted—innovative potential.

Maybe the great deal of attention that RDA devotes to the conceptual and terminological innovations was—and will be—the most interesting aspect in reading and translating the guidelines.

An open issue is the future of the Italian Translation Working Group and of the continuous updating of the translation. In fact, translators worked as volunteers, and they are not part of an institution. At the moment, it is not clear how the issue of reconciling a voluntary team with stable and dedicated work will be solved.

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Notes

1. ICCU, “Comitato Di Coordinamento E Gruppo Di Lavoro Tecnico per La Traduzione Delle Regole Di Catalogazione RDA,” 2015, http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/opencms/it/main/attivita/gruppilav_commissioni/pagina_0004.html.
2. The Italian Translation Working Group members were: Mauro Guerrini, Università degli studi di Firenze (editor); Carlo Bianchini, Università degli studi di Pavia (coeditor); Matteo Barucci, Università Bocconi; Marina Cennamo, Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma; Tiziana Dassi, Università Bocconi; Elisa Fiocchi, Scuola normale superiore di Pisa; Giuliano Genetasio, Casalini Libri; Paola Manoni, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; Patrizia Martini, ICCU; Lucia Negrini, ICCU; Luigina Orlandi, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; Franca Papi, ICCU; Federica Paradisi, formerly Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze; Maria Angela Roveda, Università Bocconi; Graziano Ruffini, Università degli studi di Firenze; Lucia Sardo, Fondazione Cini; Cristina Silvani, Università Bocconi; Francesca Socci, Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze; Elisabetta Soldati, Università di Pisa; Cristina Sorbi, Casalini Libri; Emanuela Terravecchia, Casalini Libri; Simona Turbanti, Università di Pisa; Maria Enrica Vadalà, Università degli studi di Firenze; Sara Zerini, Casalini Libri.
3. ICCU, “Accordo per I Diritti Di Traduzione in Lingua Italiana Dello Standard RDA,” 2014, http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/opencms/it/archivionovita/2014/novita_0016.html.
4. Technical Working Group for RDA translation, *Resource Description & Access (RDA). April 2014 Version. Italian Translation* (Roma: ICCU, 2015), http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2015/RDA_Traduzione_ICCU_5_Novembre_REV.pdf.

5. Even though the Translation Working Group was made up of twenty-four people, the amount of work, on average, was a total of fifty to sixty printed pages per person.
6. IFLA, *IFLA Cataloguing Principles: Statement of International Cataloguing Principles (ICP) and Its Glossary*. Edited by Barbara B. Tillett and Ana Lupe Cristan (München: Saur, 2009), <http://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-series-on-bibliographic-control-37>; IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records. Final Report* (München: K.G. Saur, 1998), <http://www.ifla.org/files/cataloguing/frbr/frbr.pdf>.
7. Barbara B. Tillett, "Report on the International Conference on the Principles and Future Development of AACR, Held October 23–25, 1997, in Toronto, Canada," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1998): 31–55, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J104v26n02_05#; Jean Weihs, ed., *The Principles and Future of AACR: Proceedings of the International Conference of the Principles and Future of AACR, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, October 23–25, 1997* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1998).
8. IFLA ISBD Review Group, and IFLA Section on Cataloguing, *ISBD International Standard Bibliographic Description. Consolidated Edition. Recommended by the ISBD Review Group. Approved by the Standing Committee of the IFLA Cataloguing Section* (Berlin; München: De Gruyter Saur, 2011), http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2012/ISBD_2012_trad_it_online.pdf.
9. *Informacion complementaria del titulo* in Spanish and *Titelzusätzen* in German.
10. The same adjective is used to name a particular kind of Italian school, Istituto comprensivo, which offers curricula for two or more scholastic degrees (for example, from primary to secondary education).