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New Terms for New Concepts:
Reflections about the Italian Translation of RDA

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the work of the Italian Translation Working Group, describing its different steps and emerging issues. Authors argue that in a few but difficult cases, 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 was partially or completely new, because it was essential not to deprive the original text of its – real or attempted – innovative potential. In translating new terms of RDA, three possible approaches are to use in different cases: following tradition, common use, or relying on the context. The authors believe that all the three approaches are correct, but when the results from the first or the second approach are ineffective or doubtful, only the last one – relying on the context – can support the correct, and hopefully largely agreed, decision.

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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, informally selected by Italy's General Directorate for Library Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright on the 23rd of August 2013, officially was appointed in October 2013. Then on the 31st March 2014, ICCU (Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information) achieved an agreement with ALA (the American Library Association) on the translations rights of RDA. Immediately afterwards 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. The translation was completed in June 2015 and published in a PDF version on the ICCU website in November (still available online).[1]

As a first step, the Group shared a preliminary set of rules in order to translate into Italian some wordings, idiomatic expressions, verb phrases, and other standard phrases and substantive terms used in the original English text. 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 have needed to be resolved during translation, and 3) it included essential new terms and concepts that the cataloging world was addressing.

As to consistency, for example, rules were established to translate adverbs and articles as follows:

> *Adverbs.* If 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 the definite article.*

> 1. Use the definite article to point out a given occurrence (and that only). For example: (original) Chronological designation of first issue or part of sequence = (translation) Designazione cronologica dell'ultimo fascicolo o parte della sequenza

> 2. Don't use the definite article at the beginning of a definition. For example: (original) Encoded bit rate: The speed at which … = (translation) Velocità di … [not: *La* velocità di…]

> 3. In a list, don't repeat the indefinite article before every noun following the first one, even if they don't agree in gender. For example: (original) assembled by a person, family, or corporate body = (translation) raccolta da una persona, famiglia o ente.

Starting the translation work from the Glossary definitely helped identify some of the main problems that would have needed to be addressed during the translation, as will be explained further below.

An important characteristic of the Glossary is that it lists together more than 800 entries whose definitions are also present and identical in the text of the RDA guidelines. So the Glossary was key

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[1] http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2015/RDA_Traduzione_ICCU_5_Novembre_REV.pdf.

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to assuring the Group consistently followed new terms and concepts being addressed by the cataloging world.

The choice of the version of the text to be translated was a difficult question to solve, because RDA is continuously changing. Several months passed between the decision to do a translation and the effective official beginning of the work, and later from the start of the work and its conclusion, and from the conclusion to the upload in the RDA Toolkit. To face a text continuously developing, it became essential to fix a date of reference. The choice was the April 2014 edition (alas, a text considerably modified afterwards).

Finally, a major problem arose with the examples. This was found after the translation of the Glossary and starting from the translation of a sample chapter. In the case of nouns found in examples, such as *Parliament*, the question arose whether to leave them in English or in the source-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 predictable at all, so much so that even the choices made by the German and the French translations that were available during a good deal of our work, and, at the end of 2014, the Spanish one, disagreed several times. It must be remembered that at that time, national policies were not yet implemented in the RDA Toolkit. This is a clear evidence of a concrete difficulty in maintaining an overall comprehension of RDA philosophy.

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 introducing some new concepts from the conceptual model of resource description and access. 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, attested an evolution in RDA that builds on ICP (the *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* from IFLA) and FRBR (IFLA's conceptual model, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*). The development brought about changes – especially for issues like content versus carrier, a new way of looking at seriality, access points for works (as opposed to the older terminology "uniform titles"), that were the core of the discussion held at the International Conference on the Principles and Future of AACR, Toronto, 1997 – which also impacted the ISBD and ISSN communities.

For example the terms concerning 'content type' – cartographic content (*contenuto cartografico*), choreographic content (*contenuto coreografico*), content of accessibility (*contenuto accessibile*), colour 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.

A new vision of cataloguing is the basis of RDA. This feature reflects in the presence of many new terms and concepts, among which a few were particularly difficult to translate for different reasons; for example, access point, other title information, and comprehensive description.

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Other title information. The first example of the terminological innovations required is the translation of the data element *other title information.* By the definition of this element it is clear that it refers to "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).[2]

The nature of this element not only gives complete information on the title but also gives many other different kinds of information. So, 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 meaning.

Comprehensive description. Comprehensive description 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 was translating the concept that is described 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:
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> a) a resource issued as a single unit (e.g., a single audio disc, a PDF document);
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> 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);
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> 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 Tillett's suggestion, "descrizione comprensiva" was finally used, because it covers the resources as a whole (regardless of its particular nature).[3]

Access point. The translation of *access point* is a last example, surely with momentous consequences. *Access point* does not pose linguistic 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 interesting matter from the viewpoint of the content is in the definition. An access point 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, but in RDA is "a name, term, code, etc., representing a specific entity" (RDA 5.1.4). The comparison between the two different definitions underlines that the

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[2] *Informacion complementaria del titulo* in Spanish and *Titelzusätzen* in German.

[3] The same adjective is used to name a particular kind of Italian school, *Istituto comprensivo,* which offers curricula of two or more scholastic degrees (for example from primary to secondary education).

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verb *to represent* in RDA replaces the verbs *to search* ant *to identify* found in ICP. From a linguistic point of view it could be considered a minor change, 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; presentare); in this case the translation issue is to identify, respect, and underline this relevant conceptual change.

In many points of RDA we had to translate a text that does not stem from tradition but from innovation, and therefore uses neologisms more than consolidated traditional terms. RDA is born from the meeting of the cataloging world and the web, based on internationally agreed principles and conceptual models, and makes every effort to be compliant and to dialogue with the web, also on the terminological plane.

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 was partially or completely new. It was essential, to avoid simply translating the text with terms that merely sound assonant and familiar to the Italian reader, so as not to deprive the original text of its – real or attempted – innovative potential.

This is a key point, as it regards also present and future translations of RDA. We refer in particular to the term *item* that is an example of how a good approach to the translation should be. In Italy (as well as in other countries) there is a discussion whether to maintain the term *item* or translate it with *esemplare* (i.e., exemplar). *Item* is the solution adopted in RDA translation, but *Esemplare* is the form adopted in ICP translations (both in 2009 and in 2016 texts).

This is a relevant example of the many possible approaches to the translation of any term and of prospective risks in apparently simple translations. Possible approaches are to use:

1. a term already available in the target language;

2. a term based on the most diffused solution in other translations;

3. a term based on the full understanding of the meaning of the term in the source language.

Based on the definition of *item* in the Glossary of ICP,[4] the Italian term *esemplare* could seem correct, as this is the traditional term used in Italy for the copy of a book. Nevertheless, this approach is correct only if the concepts in the source-language and in the target language are completely or nearly completely the same. A clear clue for this control is that the term in the target-language should not have a different corresponding term in the source-language; in this case, instead, the Italian *esemplare* has its correspondent in the English *exemplar*. So, translators should ask themselves: why did not the original text use the term *exemplar*?

The second approach is based on Italian translations of previous international documents and on parallel translations (for example, French, German, and Spanish translations). In the Italian text of ICP 2009, *item* was translated by *esemplare*, but in the Italian translation of ISBD consolidated edition

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[4] A single exemplar of a manifestation.

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in 2012, *item* was maintained. In French and Spanish RDA translations *item* is maintained, while in German is changed to *exemplar/en*. So previous or parallel translations do not always help too much.

The third approach is to examine the original term not only for its meaning defined by the glossary, but also in the conceptual context it is created. The conceptual frame for both RDA and ICP is the FRBR family. In this FRBR family context – and in particular in the last arrived of this Family, i.e. IFLA LRM – there are many other terms taken from Latin, such as *Nomen*, *Res*, and *Thema*. But all these terms would have their correspondent English term. And so: why was the Latin form adopted? In the original text, Latin terms have been chosen to mean new concepts. These concepts are so new that common, frequently used, and plain, original terms cannot be used.

When the term *item* is considered in this approach, the reason why the English term *exemplar* was not used is clear: the term *item* aspires to mean something new and different from *exemplar*; for instance, the term *exemplar* applies well to a rare book, but not to a website, or an online journal, or an archive folder, or notated music.

We think there is a deep difference between *item* in FRBR and an *item* (or between *nomen* and *a name*, and so on) in a cataloging department. The first one is an conceptual entity, defined by properties such as attributes and relationships and exists only in a model, in one of many possible different models. The second one is a real object, that can be an *exemplar* of a incunable, a *copy* of a modern book, a *sample* of a natural object, an *original* of a sculpture, a *print* of a picture and even an *item* of a resource. All these real objects can be described by properties defined for the corresponding entity in a particular model, whose name is *item*.

For a similar reason, we believe, the term *creator* was introduced to define properties and to contain and extend the term and concept of *author*, and more recently, in IFLA LRM, the term *agent* is designed to contain many kinds of responsibility. In the FRBR model, *item* is an entity that expresses a class of different kinds of real *items* that share a large part of the same attributes and relationships. So it does not seem correct to translate the name of the entity with a term such as *exemplar*, which denotes only one kind of the objects – even if the most important ones – represented by the entity.

The authors believe that all the three approaches are correct: following tradition, common use, and relying on the context. But when the results from the first or the second approach are ineffective or doubtful, only the last one - relying on the context - can support the correct, and hopefully largely agreed, decision. We think that tradition and common use are categories inapplicable to terms that represent a new concept or idea. On the contrary, in this case they are dangerous and represent a betrayal of the source-text and of its intellectual content.

The great deal of attention that RDA devotes to the conceptual and terminological innovations was – and will be – the most interesting, relevant, and challenging aspect in reading and translating the guidelines.