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Traduttore, traditore:
Hebrew RDA as a Septuagint

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ABSTRACT

Hebrew-language resources are widely cataloged throughout the world, but until the era of RDA there had never been an attempt to translate a comprehensive set of cataloging terminology and definitions. Translating the result of centuries of cataloging traditions and of international cooperation into Hebrew is a highly complex task. Aside from the usual issues of grammar, syntax, and orthography, respect must be paid to the pidgin used in professional communication and in Israeli library school cataloging classes. Other factors to be considered include the highly-gendered nature of Hebrew, the effect of Academy of the Hebrew Language decisions on cataloging terminology, and the organizational challenge of translation in a country which has no national policy and standards body and whose librarianship organizations are led by volunteers. This paper will discuss the problems involved in translating RDA terminology into Hebrew as well as the innovations in the Israeli cataloging world being undertaken to facilitate an efficient and timely translation.

KEYWORDS

RDA terminology; Translation; Hebrew language; Israeli cataloguing.

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Hebrew is not only the language of the State of Israel, it is also the language of the Jewish people. Hebrew has had a long and troubled history with other languages and RDA is not the text to provoke headaches for its translators.

The translator as traitor

The Septuagint is a Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah). The story of this great translation effort is recounted in several sources. The Letter to Philocrates, an apocryphal work of the 2nd century BCE, relates how the chief librarian to the king of Egypt (likely Ptolemy II Philadelphus) requested a translation of the Jewish Bible into Greek for the Library of Alexandria's collection. The king offered gifts and rewards to the Jews in exchange for cooperation and the High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem sent 72 men, 6 from each of the 12 tribes, to Egypt to undertake the commission. The men were questioned for seven days and made to prove their wisdom and learning; they then completed the translation in 72 days to the great satisfaction of both the king and the Egyptian Jewish community (Hadas, 1973).

A very different story is featured in the Talmud (Tractate Megillah 9a):

> It is related of King Ptolemy that he brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two [separate] rooms, without telling them why he had brought them together, and he went in to each one of them and said to him, 'Translate for me the Torah of Moses your master'. God then prompted each one of them and they all conceived the same idea and wrote for him…They also wrote for him 'the beast with small legs' and they did not write 'the hare', because the name of Ptolemy's wife was Hare (The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed, 1938, pp. 49-50).

Legend has it that Ptolemy threated to kill any translator whose work differed from the others, having assumed that the translators would not be true to the text. Indeed they were not, choosing to make changes designed to safeguard the honor of the Torah. Divine intervention ensured that all the translators made the same 13 changes, thus preserving both the integrity of the text and the translators' lives.

Divine assistance seems not a bad way to ensure a good translation, but in the end Judaism does not view this translation in a positive light. "On the eighth of [the month of] Tevet in the days of Ptolemy the Torah was translated into Greek and darkness descended upon the world for three full days" (Seder 'Olam rabah, 1545, p. 21a). The anniversary of the day the translation was completed was long marked by a public fast. How does something Divinely inspired come to be seen as so bad generations of people have to fast to mourn the event?

It is not specifically the Septuagint that's the problem. The minor tractate "Scribes" (chapter 1, rule 7) says there was an earlier translation attempt organized by Ptolemy:

It once happened that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made, since the Torah could not be accurately translated (The minor tractates of the Talmud, 1965, pp. 212-213).

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And here lies the crux of the problem with translations: how can one take an original text, born into a specific time, place, and culture, and make it understandable and – even more – useful in a different time, place, and culture?

Israeli cataloging in translation

Israeli cataloging has traditions stretching back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Aside from a very brief excursion into the Prussian Instructions, the Israeli cataloging community has followed American cataloging rules with certain local modifications (Goldsmith & Adler, 2014). It has long been understood that Anglo-centric rules need to be adapted to suit local realities, but little attention has been paid to a more fundamental issue: can the base language of cataloging codes be translated from English into Hebrew and still be applicable?

Previous attempts have been made to create a linguistic basis for translating Anglo-American rules into Hebrew. In 1974 the Israel Center for Libraries issued a translation of 100 terms into English (Zanbar, 1974), with illustrations of the concepts' use on cataloging cards. In 1976 and again in 2004 the Academy of the Hebrew Language ("the Academy") created dictionaries of library science terms, translating 1422 English terms into Hebrew (Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1976, Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2004). In 1976 a multi-lingual dictionary was also published by the Academy (Dictionary of library terms, 1976), being basically the 1976 English language base terms with French and German translations added to the already-established Hebrew. All three of these translations were made without reference to the existing Hebrew language cataloging books (such as Levi, 1958, Adler & Shichor, 1978, or Adler, Shichor, & Kedar, 1995). Thus, in the dictionary the term "on demand publishing" is translated as דרישה לפי הפקה, but in Adler, Shichor & Kedar (1995) הפקה is used for production and לאור הוצאה for publication.

The 1422 terms include all aspects of library and information science; not only is the bibliographic world represented but reference, classification, indexing, codicology, and even library furnishings are as well. One would not need to make a comprehensive study to see that the massive amount of terms used in the RDA Toolkit and made available via the Open Metadata Registry (OMR) cannot possibly be covered in the Academy translations. The era of RDA was most decidedly the time for a new translation – but then the problems began.

In 2013, when the idea of translating RDA-era terms was first discussed in Israel, it had been decided that the effort involved would only be worthwhile if the translation had practical uses. The most obvious of these uses would be within the scope of the new Israeli cataloging textbook, Omanut HaKitlug [The art of cataloging] (Adler & Kedar, 2013), a free open-access work hosted online by the National Library of Israel. One of the authors of the textbook recalled the impetus for the decision to exclude most RDA terminology:

At the time we got a letter from ALA saying they heard we were doing a "Hebrew RDA book" and we need their permission and we need to pay them royalties and all kinds of things. And we said no, no, no, this thing is a Hebrew book, a cataloging manual based on RDA rules and with our own examples and whatnot.

All work on the textbook was done without remuneration, and indeed there is no library organization in Israel with the funding to pay authors or rights holders. For fear of incurring the wrath of ALA Publishing, the structure of the text is closer to AACR3 than it is to RDA. Terminology in common with the Toolkit is limited to that which was taken from FRBR.

In addition to the sole Israeli cataloging textbook choosing the simplicity of AACR3 over the complexity of RDA, the Inter-University Cataloging Committee (IUCC) - acting as the informal national decision-maker on academic cataloging - chose to focus on creating a practical set of rules for catalogers to follow rather than on translating the more comprehensive guidelines of RDA. Since most manifestations cataloged in Israeli academic libraries are print books and serials, in 2013-2015 a series of rules were issued for RDA-in-MARC cataloging of those formats. Relationships in RDA which were not, at that time, in widespread use at the Library of Congress (such as Appendix J) or which were not associated with bibliographic records (such as Appendix K) were put aside. Though Appendix I terms were translated into Hebrew, in deference to ALA Publishing the definitions were not. A study of Israeli cataloging records shows that Appendix I terms are frequently misapplied because catalogers misunderstand what specific terms include and what they exclude.

Who benefits?

When contemplating a translation of RDA into Hebrew the same question arose again and again: Given the high cost – in time, effort, and in cold hard cash – of translating RDA, is the effort worth it?

To answer that, it first needs to be established who would benefit from a translation. Working catalogers? The few terms needed by catalogers working in university libraries (according to the academic library managers of foreign cataloging departments who were the strongest contingent on the IUCC) had been translated. Several areas, such as RDA content-media-carrier types and digital file types from RDA 3.19.2.3, started out as English-only controlled vocabularies within Israeli cataloging records and it was unclear to Israeli cataloging authorities that they could be used in the vernacular language of cataloging. Therefore these terms appear in Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian bibliographic records in English, and no need was felt to translate them or their definitions for working catalogers.

The main beneficiaries of translating RDA terminology were assumed to be college librarians, public librarians (who for the most part buy AACR2 bibliographic records from The Israel Center for Libraries), and students. Few Israeli library school graduates choose a future in cataloging. It was felt that the cataloging textbook was quite enough for students; if they chose to turn to professional cataloging their workplaces could supplement their training. Therefore there was no need to invest in translating RDA for their benefit.

If anything, translating RDA terminology for catalogers not working at elite institutions could shake the authority vested in the recognized hierarchy. As the Septuagint shook the ancient Jewish world because no longer did one need to understand Hebrew to read the Scriptures, translating RDA into Hebrew would mean that no longer did working catalogers have to understand the high-level English

of the Toolkit or rely on IUCC decisions to interpret the Toolkit for them. When guidelines are available in the vernacular, all adherents have equal access.

There seemed to be little reason for a Hebrew translation of RDA and many reasons against such a time-consuming effort. Yet two years after RDA implementation in Israeli academic libraries there was a renewed push for a translation, if not of the whole Toolkit, at least of the OMR terminology. What changed in those two years?

Rethinking translations

In the summer of 2016 Israel was given permission to translate OMR terms without being required to pay ALA Publishing for the privilege. Though the cost of man-power to translate the terms still remained high, it could be done without external deadlines and without an upfront cost. At the same time, copy catalogers searching for records in OCLC's WorldCat noticed an increase in use of Appendices J & K terminology in bibliographic and authority records. The appearance of these new terms in foreign language cataloging meant that RDA courses for working catalogers had to teach the proper use of the appendices and this in turn led Hebrew and Arabic catalogers to request terms they could use in their original cataloging records.

A final reason for the increased understanding of the importance of translated terminology was the startling realization that the translation of Appendix I terms into Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian without corresponding translation of term definitions led to serious errors in application.

Relationship designators frequently misused in Israeli cataloging include:

- Filmmaker used in place of director

- Commentator used for writers of commentary on Biblical texts

- Annotator used for writers of commentary printed in general texts

- Designer used in place of book designer

- Issuing body used for publishers who were transcribed in the publication elements or for all non-profits in any way connected with the resource

- Curator used in cataloging art catalogs

- Respondent used on legal materials

When it was realized how many errors were creeping in to cataloging records because the terms had been translated as stand-alone and listed as drop down lists in the ALEPH cataloging module, it was decided to translate definitions and create a training system to disseminate the information. The success of these efforts led to a renewed interest in translating the rest of RDA terminology, though not without some lingering pockets of resistance and not without many of the initial problems still unsolved.

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Committee work

The IUCC is a large body, with over 30 members, over 20 of whom are active. Trying to get this large a group to act as one runs contrary to accepted management wisdom (Blenko, Rogers, & Mankins, 2010). Indeed, this configuration proved impractical for decision making and a smaller RDA sub-committee was formed. "To try to do this with 30 people, it's not possible. With five people we worked really well," said the head of the IUCC in 2014, but extended experience showed that even the group of five (later expanded to nine) was unwieldy: Appendix I terms were translated in March of 2014 and not updated until mid-2016; translation of Appendix J and M terms was begun in mid-2014 and only two of the hundreds of terms were translated and adopted for use in cataloging by mid-2017.

The reason why translation work stalled is a problem common to many involved in RDA implementation and decision making: those knowledgeable enough to do the work were also charged with responsibilities in their home libraries. Given the high manpower cost of translation and the low immediate returns, no institution prioritized the translation and none of the librarians involved found reason to work on the translation outside of work time.

In 2017 a new translation working group was convened, composed of only two people, one of whom is retired. The workflow has changed and the committee no longer consults the sub-committee (which hasn't met since March of 2016). In July of 2017 the full IUCC agreed that they need not be involved in the translation work; the translation working group was asked to show the finished translations to the IUCC but no major dissent was anticipated.

Some drawbacks of a two-person committee are obvious; translating all the OMR terms and definitions is a lot of work for only two. In addition, there are other risks that are less obvious, such as the need for language skills. When there is a small pool of resources to draw upon, what skills take priority? Does the committee need to be composed of native Hebrew speakers or is command of the subtleties of the English language more important? How much emphasis should be placed on subject matter knowledge? Is it important that the members of the committee be fully conversant with music, bookbinding, and television broadcast technologies? As the chair of the IUCC said in 2014, "Author I can translate, but there were a lot of very special – there were terms that were special for special materials, there were terms for law catalogers and for music catalogers …"

Hebrew as a target language – a sample of the problems

Hebrew has subtleties which have accumulated over the course of millennia – complex grammatical structures borrowed from every language it has come into contact with. It is a hybrid language (Zuckermann, 2006), combining Biblical and modern Hebrew, Semitic and Indo-European influences, and a variety of secondary influences. Should a translation adhere to the strict (and often controversial or ignored) rulings of the Academy of the Hebrew Language or should it tend more towards the loose agglomeration of proper Hebrew, slang, and transliteration used by Israeli catalogers? May words translated in one context (such as monochrome and polychrome, translated by the Academy as part of its ceramics dictionary) be used without comment in a library context?

How much history need be incorporated into a new translation? Some words needed for any cataloging code have been used for centuries to mean something quite different. For example, the carrier extent

unit term "leaf" is defined in the Toolkit as "two pages, one on each side, either or both of which may be blank." The term used for this in Israeli cataloging is דף (daf), but this term is also used to denote a page of the Talmud, printed on both sides. In previous translations of library terminology (Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1976, Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2004) the term daf was also used as the translation for bibliographic format term "folio."

The best Hebrew word for "polychrome," צבעוני, had been used in the past for an undefined "colored". Should that term be used, redefining AACR2-era descriptions of color illustrations to an anachronistic polychrome? Do translators have permission to employ words which historic usage has defined in one way to mean something else? If not, from whence can they draw words and will those neologisms be properly understood?

A great part of the answer is dependent upon a question raised earlier: who is the audience for the translation? Added to this (when translating words which will appear in catalogs) is another question: who is the audience for catalog records and what terminology will they understand?

RDA Appendices

This question was a large part of the reason behind the slowdown in adoption of Appendix J in Hebrew cataloging. While foreign-language cataloging departments waited for the Library of Congress to begin using the appendix in bibliographic records, the Hebrew cataloging community had a very partial translation of the appendix and could begin to use it on their own schedule. But the word chosen for container, מיכל (meichal), is most commonly used as the container for objects and seemed to many native speakers of Hebrew a ridiculous term to put in their cataloging; they resisted the wording since they did not feel they had the power, within the Israeli cataloging world, to lobby for change.

Another significant problem in the translation of the Appendices is that the structure of Hebrew is vastly different from that of English. Even a simple word such as "has" does not exist in Hebrew. The two closest terms have slightly but crucially different meanings: יש (yesh) is more "there is" than "has" and קיים (kayam) speaks more of existence. The word "relates" can be translated as מייחס (m'yaches) (refers to) or מקשר (m'kasher) (connects with), neither of which is a literal translation of the English. Thus, a simple phrase like "has electronic reproduction" and its definition can be translated at least four ways. Hebrew is also a poorer language than is English: there is no elegant way to translate the phrase "creation of a work," for in Hebrew work, עבודה (avodah), refers to the physical act while יצירה (yetzirah) refers to the creative impulse, to the intellectual product. In Hebrew, the proper phrase would be יצירת יצירה (yetzirat yetzirah – the creation of a creation), a repetition which is agreed by all is ugly but necessary.

As an additional complication, the question of less familiar but truly Hebrew words or more familiar transliteration comes into play. Shall "reproduction" be שיעתוק (shiatuk) or the more common רפרודוקציה (reproductziah)? Are independent films סרטים עצמאיים (seratim atzmaiyim) or אינדי סרטי (sirtei indie)? And what on earth are we to do with the poor "letterer," which does not really exist in Hebrew except as a transliterated gerund (לטרינג, lettering, but rarely לטרר letterer, as required by RDA Appendix I)?

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"Foucault stipulates that a 'work,' in the modern era, is both defined and constrained by the name of the author – 'the author function.' Foucault's 'author function' is a system of classification where the name of the author (as opposed to 'signer,' 'guarantor,' or 'writer') identifies, elevates, and frames a text. The author function has to do with ownership and transgression. The author functions as the founder of a discourse, the owner of the property of a text, and, as such, an individual subject, both privileged and psychologized, whose biography gives meaning to and takes meaning from the text." (Daniel, 2007, p. 143)

Foucault draws an important distinction between the role of an author and that of a writer, as does RDA, particularly in Appendix I. Though there are two appropriate terms in Hebrew, מחבר (mechaber - author) and כותב (kotev - writer) the distinction between these two is far stronger than that between the terms in English. While the terms in English draw a line between work-related responsibility and expression, kotev is a term expressing a means of production, the physical act of writing, and so belongs to the manifestation or item level. With no choice the Hebrew terms for all the "writer of" relationship designators was forced to go up to the work level term mechaber, thus blurring the distinction which so naturally and practically was created.

Basic terminology

Translation problems began when the Inter-University Cataloging Committee first attempted to translate the basic RDA and FRBR terminology in 2013. The first question raised was what to call the new guidelines: RDA or the literal Hebrew translation of the full "Resource description and access") וגישה משאב תיאור – (ti'ur mashab v'gishah). Since Israeli catalogers had been hearing rumors of RDA for years before it was adopted in Israel and since the Hebrew term did not trip easily off the tongue, it was decided that even in Hebrew and Arabic documentation the next cataloging guidelines' name would remain RDA, an island of Latin letters in a Semitic sentence.

Translating FRBR terminology proved no easier. The 2008 translation of WEMI (as reflected in Kedar, 2008) used גילוי (gilu'yi) for manifestation – literally "discovery." When it was decided that the term was not quite accurate and was too easily confused with ביטוי (bitu'yi – expression) it was replaced with התגלמות (hitgalmut), "manifestation". Thus, early texts about RDA differ in terminology from later.
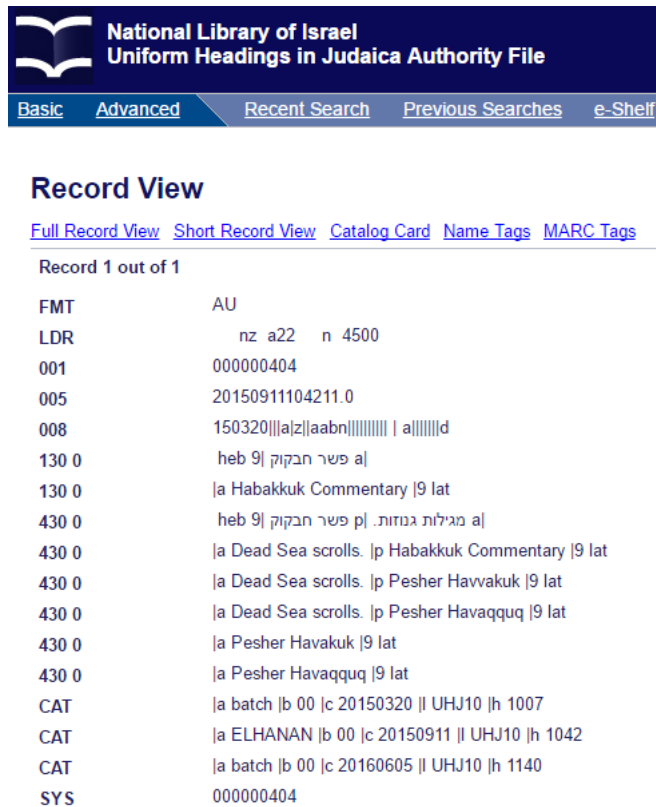
The difference between transcription and recording of elements was translated as the difference between העתקה (ha'atakah – transcription, literally 'copying') and רישום (rishum – recording, literally 'listing'). The latter term is, according to the Academy, simply incorrect, for it should be used only for things which go into lists and the verb כתב (katav, a form of which is early discussed in the context of writers and authors) should be used for the act of expressing meaning in letters (Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2012). In any case, even the Academy's preferred term does not fully capture the essence of what is done to turn information into a recorded element.

Another translation which has proven to be less-than-accurate is מדיה (mediya) for RDA media type. The RDA term refers to mediation while the Hebrew term refers to media. The choice of inaccurate term made teaching RDA media type difficult, but in day-to-day work, as RDA content, media, and

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carrier types are English-only controlled vocabularies and as most catalogers work with templates which already have fields 336/7/8 filled out, there was no lingering ill effects.

Titles

Authorized access points for religious works (RDA Toolkit 6.30.1), particularly for classic works of Jewish literature (the Bible, Talmud, etc.) were still, in the RDA environment, called "uniform titles" in AACR2 nomenclature. Since this is terminology frequently used in cataloging talk and from this is derived the name of one of the Israeli authority databases (UHJ – Uniform Headings in Judaica), the choice to retain the older term echoes Dunsire & Willer's finding: "the 'uniform' heading concept constrains future content to fit legacy content" (2014, p. 3).

Figure 1. RDA record for Habakkuk Commentary in the Uniform Headings in Judaica database (public view); screen captured October 14, 2016

Even modern terminology presented challenges: A widely used term which is nearly impossible to translate into Hebrew is the conventional collective title "lyrics." In Hebrew, the word for lyrics is milim – literally, "words." How absurd would it be to state that the conventional collective title for a work is "Words" or even "Words. Selection"? Are not poems and short stories and essays also "words"?

Working with the OMR

In an attempt to test the parameters within which we would be translating we decided to start with a small set of terms: gender. There are but three terms in the gender set; how complicated could it be? As it turns out, very.

Hebrew is clearly unlike English in terms of gender; English is grammatically "genderless" while Hebrew is a highly gendered language. In fact, Hellinger & Bußmann (2001, p. 20) argue that "white middle class North American English," the variety spoken (along with white middle class UK English) by most members of the RSC, "cannot be regarded as representative of other languages also."

The three choices given us for gender are female ("The gender designation for woman or girl"), male ("The gender designation for man or boy") and unknown ("The gender designation when specific gender is unknown"). Others have discussed the problematic nature of these choices (most notably Billey, Drabinski, & Roberto, 2014), but they have not touched upon the problem several European languages, as well as Hebrew and Arabic, face: in our languages people are not the only gendered entities. How can we translate this table, remaining true to the spirit of RDA but allowing terms to be defined in ways that make sense to catalogers and to library patrons?

For example, cacti are not people. They often have male and female parts in the same flower. The children's television character Kishkashta, a cactus, is always presented as a male. He is neither man nor boy, but identifies as male – prior to the recent ruling that RDA translations need not be absolutely literal, how could the gender table be translated in a manner which allowed for a male-only specimen of a bi-gendered plant species?

Figure 2. Kishkasta, the male cactus

Even after all the problems of terminology are overcome there remains a fundamental issue which must be dealt with before translated terms can be fully incorporated into the OMR. While English and European languages are written left to right, Hebrew, along with a handful of other languages, is written right to left.

The RDA Broadcast Standard term "HDTV" makes no sense completely translated into Hebrew. How can we maintain the meaning of the acronym when Hebrew uses none of those four letters?
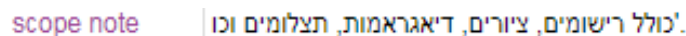
"גבוהה בהפרדה טלוויזיה" שם על נקרא. דיגיטלי טלוויזיוני לשידור קידוד שיטת שהוא שידור סטנדרט.

A fully Hebrew translation loses the connection between HDTV and High Definition Television, but is fully right-to-left.

High-definition television. שם על נקרא. דיגיטלי טלוויזיוני לשידור קידוד שיטת שהוא שידור סטנדרט

A mixed-language translation which maintains the connection between HDTV and High Definition Television, but requires the reader (and computer systems) to read the first part of the sentence from right to left and at the English words switch to left-to-right and back to right-to-left for the terminal punctuation.

The Open Metadata Registry is still not set up to handle right-to-left languages.

scope note ‎'כולל רישומים, ציורים, דיאגראמות, תצלומים וכו.

Figure 3. The scope note for RDA Content Type "still image".

Compare Figure 3 with the original scope note as sent to the registry maintainers:

‎'וכו תצלומים, דיאגרמות, ציורים, רישומים כולל.

Note that the two terminal characters – the apostrophe and the period – have switched sides and in the Open Metadata Registry appear on the right (the start of the sentence) rather than on the left. Instead of signifying an abbreviation and the end of a sentence, the characters are nonsensically out of context. If the Registry cannot handle a simple right-to-left sentence, how will it handle a sentence of mixed directionality?

Conclusion

Translating RDA into Hebrew has met with multiple stumbling blocks: a lack of money, time, and personnel on the local end, a vocabulary-poor language emanating from a distinctly different culture from that which created RDA terminology, and local library community not used to cooperating across specialty lines. However, it is increasingly clear that large swaths of RDA terminology must be translated if we are to create records which meet international standards. The inclusion of local records in international databases such as Worldcat and Ex Libris's Alma Community Zone has added pressure to standardization efforts – though Hebrew and Arabic resources are cataloged worldwide, the previous isolation of vernacular records is now being lifted and our records emerging into the blinding light of day.

It has become clear that RDA terminology must be translated, but the need for practicality cannot be ignored. Thus, the first terms which are being translated are those most often used in descriptive cataloging and indexing – Appendices I, J, K, and M. They will also serve as a refresher course for the translation team, reminding them of the primacy of relationships in RDA theory and practice.

The other set of translations short-listed for immediate attention are those designed to give the translation team an immediate sense of satisfaction - short groups of terms such as gender terms and

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broadcast standards. That set has revealed the complexity of cultural issues and technical difficulties which the translation team must solve in creating translations and definitions true to RDA guidelines and local culture and needs.

In light of the IUCC decision to create local best practice documents for a number of non-book communities, the translation team will also be coordinating efforts by specialists in those areas, enriching the translation of RDA terms with academic and practical knowledge in music, audio-visual materials, and cartography.

R. Simeon B. Gamaliel says that books [of the scripture] also are permitted to be written only in Greek… Scripture says God enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; [this means] that the words of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem (The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed, 1938, p. 50)

We do think that RDA can be a thing of beauty in Israeli catalogs. Therefore we are working to bring the terminology of Japheth, the RDA terms used by the international cataloging community, into the tents of Shem, into the Semitic languages of Hebrew and, eventually, Arabic. But it is not going to be an easy task – we may well need Divine intervention.

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JLIS.it

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