

The Translation of a Standard: Translating and Adapting RDA into French

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Abstract: This article reports on a joint translation project (France and Canada) of the RDA standard into French. We describe how the translation committee was set up, explain the methodology, and present the measures taken to ensure consistency and interoperability. We conclude with “lessons learned” that could help others embarking on such a project.

Résumé : Cet article présente un projet de traduction commune (France et Canada) de la norme RDA en français. Nous décrivons le fonctionnement du comité de traduction, expliquons la méthodologie, et présentons les mesures prises pour assurer la cohérence et l’interopérabilité. Nous concluons avec les « leçons apprises » qui aideront ceux qui désirent entreprendre un projet similaire.

“Designed for the digital world and an expanding universe of metadata users, *RDA: Resource Description and Access*, is the new unified cataloging standard”¹ that was implemented in many national libraries around the world in 2013. Translating RDA into French (*Ressources : description et accès*) was an essential prerequisite for Canada’s full implementation of the RDA standard. Since 1980, Canadian French-language libraries have applied AACR2 in French translation (*Règles de catalogage anglo-américaines*) and it was deemed essential that they be provided with a French version of RDA to make the transition to the new standard feasible. Thus, in 2009, when the release of the first version of the RDA text was imminent, a quadripartite translation partnership involving Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) and ASTED (Association pour l’avancement des techniques et des sciences de la documentation) was established. Each of these four institutions designated a number of representatives to constitute the membership of the French editorial committee for RDA (*Comité éditorial francophone*).

Work started shortly after RDA was published in June 2010. In the spirit of internationalization, the aim was to arrive at a single French-language version of RDA equally suitable for Canadian and European francophone libraries and insofar as we were able, also useful for French-language libraries world-wide. The functional objective was to produce a French-language *adaptation* of the original English text—rather than a *literal* translation—that would be applicable within a variety of French-language work environments. To ensure equal representation of each party within the committee, members agreed on a multi-lateral organizational structure, which meant that no central editor was designated and that each constituency was responsible for forming and then training its own translation teams and dispatching the work accordingly.

Following the March 2nd 2012 announcement by the Library of Congress² regarding the planned full implementation of RDA on March 31st 2013—which was also the target date set by LAC and BAnQ—it was of paramount importance to the committee that the translation project be completed as close as possible to that date. In the end, RDA in

French was included in the first release of the RDA Toolkit for 2013 (issued May 14th 2013) and published in print form in June.³ This included the April 2012 RDA update resulting from amendments adopted by the JSC in 2011, and all corrections and minor changes up to and including the October 2012 RDA Toolkit release.

Prior to beginning the translation of the text *per se*, a translation methodology was established and commonly agreed upon. We decided to first invest time in three simultaneous actions that we believed were to save time in the long run. First, we translated the RDA glossary—approximately 600 terms with their definitions—to establish the specialized French terminology to be used in the translation. The bilingual glossary that resulted from this exercise served as a common tool for the various translation teams that were scattered amongst the four collaborating institutions. Second, from the English text of RDA, we extracted and compiled a list of approximately 85 recurring phrases that we translated into French. This list proved useful in speeding up the translation substantially and in ensuring stylistic consistency. Third, we also decided to translate Chapter 0 and part of Appendix D to test and establish an efficient and practical procedure for translating the various RDA chapters and appendices. This test was useful in establishing a proofreading sequence between teams and in learning to work with the Word and, subsequently, Excel templates provided to us by ALA Publishing into which we had to enter the translated data.

We also worked closely with ALA Publishing on the translation of the RDA Toolkit interface into French and on refining and testing the integrated search engine regarding handling of specific characters such as the “œ” ligature (often used in RDA since “work” translates to “*œuvre*”) and diacritic characters.

For the translation of the RDA chapters and appendices, several measures were taken to ensure that all contributing parties would be satisfied with the end result. Establishing a common glossary right from the start of the project was a fundamental step that resolved most of the issues regarding differences between Canadian and European French usage for cataloguing-related terminology. Another fundamental principle on which we agreed right at the beginning was to work within a crossed double-proofreading model (*revisions croisées*) between France and Canada, meaning that if a chapter was translated by a French team, it would get revised by a Canadian team and vice versa. This was deemed essential since France and Canada do not entirely share a common cataloguing tradition, meaning that some practices differ between the two countries. Once we agreed on this principle, the chapters were divided up and dispatched to specific translating teams who were then paired with a counterpart from the other country for the revision. These assignments were made taking into account the length of the chapters, any areas of particular expertise of the team members, and the structure of RDA. To enhance consistency, chapters within a single section and any related appendices were assigned to the same team either for translation or for revision. Specific deadlines were established for each step of the process and, as mentioned earlier, progress reports were presented at each meeting and adjustments were made to the timetable as necessary.

As could be expected, the translation of RDA was not always straightforward and the translation teams and editorial committee had to devise strategies to overcome various challenges. These challenges can be grouped into those involved in adapting the examples in RDA, those related to the text of the instructions, technical issues, as well as logistical and managerial challenges.

Despite the complexity of the project itself and of the multi-lateral partnership involved, the basic methodology we adopted served us well for the most part, and certainly did not prevent the completion of the translation of RDA. However, there are aspects that we would have done differently or taken more care over if we had known at the outset certain things we now know.

The translation of an evolving standard is an ongoing process which requires a long-term and enduring commitment. Knowing that a well-crafted and useful product has been produced and made available to the community when needed was extremely gratifying to all committee members, and it is with renewed enthusiasm that we now embark on another round of meetings to ensure that francophone cultural institutions be provided with an accurate, up-to-date, and high-quality version of the standard to allow the precise description of and efficient access to their valuable resources.

1. <http://www.rdatoolkit.org/>.

2. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/news_rda_implementation_date.html.

3. Pat Riva. "The French translation of RDA is published". *SCATNews*, number 39 (June 2013), p. 15. <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/cataloguing/scatn/scat-news-39.pdf>.