

Discussion 6

Identify one topic of discussion on the AUTOCAT or RDA-L email lists from this semester and briefly summarize the conversation. What did you learn from the discussion? What are your thoughts concerning the topic of discussion?

I subscribed to AUTOCAT in January of 2014. For my research paper I chose the topic about issues of cataloging materials in non-Roman languages. It was interesting to know different catalogers' opinions on the subject. I posted my question and for a month or so this discussion took place in AUTOCAT. I received interesting feedback that sometimes looked controversial. Catalogers dealing with Romanization demonstrated some disagreement between themselves. Aaron Kuperman expressed an opinion that transliteration doesn't help to be able to read the script if a user doesn't know the language. His point was that, for example, Russian written with a Polish version of Roman letters, or Yiddish with a German version of Roman letters would be intelligible to someone familiar with Slavic or Germanic languages, respectively. However, Hebrew, or Arabic, or Chinese, or Japanese when written using Roman letters will be unintelligible to someone with no knowledge of those languages. To illustrate I use his example, if a user doesn't know what a זופת is, it doesn't help if a cataloger writes it "tapuz". It is still of no use to the user. Besides, such languages as Chinese, Arabic, and Hebrew have dialects. If the Romanization is not done according to the dialect it may be totally unintelligible for a native speaker.

Other catalogers, for example, James Weinheimer and Wojciech Siemaszkiewicz did not agree with the point. They insist that transliteration is vital for many users who are learning a foreign language, but it is also very important for staff who can often pick up quite a bit on the job once something has been transliterated. I liked the examples that have been used to prove the point. The Russian баскетбол or ресторан looks incomprehensible to someone who doesn't know, but when transliterated, they spell "basketbol" (basketball) and "restoran" (restaurant). It looks quite understandable. Cyrillic is a one-to-one transliteration, after you determine the correct language. This means that a letter may be the same in Russian or Ukrainian or Serbian, but each language transliterates that same letter differently.

These examples are demonstrative enough. I agree that the transliteration of non-Roman alphabets helps catalogers and users to read titles if they are not familiar with the original language. Thus, they can find material in foreign languages. Of course, the process of Romanization is very time-consuming. Technology allowing the automation of the process would be very welcome.

Transliteration was used for generations because libraries didn't have typewriters in multiple scripts. Later, computers couldn't handle non-roman alphabets. Before OCLC there were attempts to create specific programs that helped flip letters, for example, Russian records into Cyrillic. There are still languages that OCLC and LC can't handle such as Armenian.

This is a very broad topic with many issues, challenges, and nuances. I learned a lot from this valuable discussion.
