The Formation of IRANMARC

Historical background

1966 (i.e. 1345 in the Iranian calendar) was the year of a historical landmark in the development of modern librarianship in Iran. In that year, the Graduate School of Librarianship was inaugurated as part of the Faculty of Education in The University of Tehran, and the Iranian Library Association was created to make the first steps in introducing the importance of this profession and its impacts on society.

Two years later in 1967 (i.e. 1347), we witnessed the second major event in our profession. The creation of The Iranian Documentation Center (IRANDOC) and the Tehran Book Processing Center (TEBROC), both part of the Institute for Research and Planning in Science and Education, affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education.

These centers opened the doors for research in various fields of library profession.

IRANDOC was in charge of collecting books and serials in various fields of science and technology, mainly in English language, and providing reference services in those fields to researchers in various universities and research centers. To achieve these goals, extensive research in the adaptation of international standards in abstracting, publication of scientific serials, etc. were needed and carried out.

TEBROC, besides acting as the first Iranian center of centralized acquisition and cataloging, was in charge of research in technical services for the treatment of Persian language library materials and the adaptation of international standards to the needs of Iranian libraries as well as creating the Persian list of subject headings, devising classification schemes both in DDC and LC classification schedules related to the History, Geography, Languages and Literatures of Iran, Philosophy and also to our religion Islam.

The creation of the two centers opened the opportunity of recognizing our profession as being research oriented and gave the chance of holding faculty status to qualified librarians.

Merger of TEBROC and NLI

With the merger of TEBROC and the National Library of Iran in 1983 (i.e. 1362) a major revision in the status of the national library was approved, its tasks and duties were redefined.

Benefitting from improved regulations and facilities and even a fantastic new building, the NLI became the main driving force for innovative research and implementation of new national standards.

The merger of TEBROC and NLI redefined the National Library as active both in the collection of the intellectual heritage and making it available to researchers. The NLI was assigned to act as the national body responsible for developing the National Information Network, as well as the National Bibliographic Agency responsible for international bibliographic services.

Anglo-American cataloging rules were already in use since 1968, and adapted to Persian language treatment of materials, and Persian subject heading lists were established and used by various libraries in Iran. The first consideration of using international standards when unified was the adoption of ISBD standards in the publication of the Iranian National Bibliography in 1983 (i.e. 1362).

Ever since late 1960s, few years after the Library of Congress started MARC project, TEBROC dreamed of Machine Readable Cataloging and a national automated system for exchange of bibliographic information. Many efforts were made and in 1973 even a senior consultant of Scientific Control Systems Ltd. from England visited TEBROC for 2 weeks on contract and submitted a feasibility study regarding mechanization of some library services.

In 1994 (i.e. 1373), with the obvious movement of libraries towards mechanized systems, the NLI took its first steps by using CDS-ISIS, a software specially designed for accommodating bibliographic records and recommended by UNESCO. This software was adapted to Persian characters and records.

A number of private companies were already created and had designed software for the treatment of library materials and many Iranian libraries were using them for the treatment of their holdings.

Selection of a format

It didn’t take long for the NLI to realize that it had to step in and select an internationally recognized format for the treatment of its holdings.

The selection of a format by the National Library would clearly have meant its approval for use in other libraries and especially by the new software developers. It therefore needed a much more meticulous and elaborate choice.

Research members of the NLI started several projects and studied a variety of existing systems and programs. At the international level, there were not many options available and the choice was between USMARC and UNIMARC, and at the national level it included the ones already in use by software developers in Iran.

It all led to a long term comprehensive review and assessment. Finally in 1997 (i.e. 1376), the NLI decided to develop a national MARC format to serve as both an internal format as well as for exchange purposes. The project was formulated and proposed to the National Research Council of Iran, for approval and funding. After its approval the format was labelled IRANMARC.

In 1998 (i.e. 1377) A national committee was formed of 8 members mainly from the faculty members of the NLI and 3 members from other institutions, all of them selected for their expertise. (The list of members is published in the introduction of IRANMARC published in 2002 by the National Library.)

The first few meetings were devoted to reviewing the options. USMARC had the advantage of being an already a tested format supported by the Library of Congress, warranted by publication and widely adopted at least by national libraries in English speaking countries.

UNIMARC was a format proposed by IFLA which meant potentially wider users by national libraries around the world, with less supports but more open to the needs expressed by different users with different languages.

The decision of the committee was to adopt and adapt UNIMARC.

The detailed reasons for selecting UNIMARC is listed in an article published in 2008 (1)

The decision was based on several factors the most important ones being:

1. Offering a more computer oriented approach
2. Developed by an internationally composed committee of experts and supported by IFLA
3. Having the capacity to be used both as internal format as well as exchange
4. Being capable of holding multi-language records, etc.

The next major decision of this committee was to limit its activities. As a pilot project, it was decided to select only the fields relating to monographic printed materials in UNIMARC Bibliographic. Once this part was defined it could be used as basis for future additions.

The text of UNIMARC was translated into Persian and adapted and approved by the committee. It took innumerable hours of preparation for translation and selection of specific fields and subfields adapting it the needs of Persian language treatment of materials.

One major task was the selection of appropriate examples to help a better understanding for users.

Around 35 sessions of meeting were held for the reviewing and approval of the translation and the needed adaptations.

The first edition of IRANMARC was published in 2002 by the National Library and offered to major libraries and software designers for use or consideration.

RASA

In 1981 the National Library decided to develop an integrated system for the organization and treatment of its materials.

Obviously IRANMARC was going to be the format for this system. This time it was decided to include other UNIMARC formats such as Authorities and Holdings.

The published text covered only limited fields, but was clear enough to be used as a handbook for NLI personnel. The entire list of fields were included pending their use.

A detailed paper concerning this project which is called Rasa will be presented.

IranMARC Development Project

Years later the problem of referring to the original text for use by catalogers surfaced.

On the one hand, not all the users of the system are fluent enough in English to use the original English version of UNIMARC and on the other hand the text of UNIMARC itself is not always in a very fluent English.

To minimize the potential misuse of fields by the users, in the National Library or in other libraries, it was decided that the full text of UNIMARC should be considered.

Obviously the outcome will be the full text of IRANMARC. So, the adaptations made for the use in Iranian libraries, and especially the options specifically used by the National Library should clearly be included to avoid any kind of misunderstanding.

A detailed paper relating to the activities of the Project will be presented as well.

1. Taavoni, Shirin. *“IRANMARC: design and implementation of a national bibliographic format for the National Library and Archives of Iran”.* International cataloging and bibliographic control. Vol. 36, no 4. October-December, 2008 pp. 66-69.