ISO

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION

ISO RECOMMENDATION
R 233

INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM
FOR THE TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC CHARACTERS

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BRIEF HISTORY

The ISO Recommendation R 233, *International System for the Transliteration of Arabic Characters*, was drawn up by Technical Committee ISO/TC 46, *Documentation*, the Secretariat of which is held by the Nederlands Instituut voor Documentatie en Registratuur (N.I.D.E.R.) on behalf of the Stichting Nederlands Normalisatie-instituut (NNI).

Work on this question by the Technical Committee began in 1956 and led, in 1959, to the adoption of a Draft ISO Recommendation.

In April 1959, this Draft ISO Recommendation (No. 353) was circulated to all the ISO Member Bodies for enquiry. It was approved by the following Member Bodies :

Austria	Israel	Romania
Chile	Italy	Spain
Czechoslovakia	Japan	Sweden
France	Netherlands	Switzerland
Germany	New Zealand	United Kingdom
Hungary	Norway	Yugoslavia
India	Poland	

Three Member Bodies opposed the approval of the Draft :

Belgium, Denmark, U.S.A.

The Draft ISO Recommendation was then submitted by correspondence to the ISO Council, which decided, in December 1961, to accept it as an ISO RECOMMENDATION.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

ON THE

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration is the operation of representing the characters or signs of any one alphabet by those of any other, but this note refers only to transliteration of non-Latin alphabets into the Latin alphabet (also termed "Roman alphabet"). For documentation purposes the main requirement is that non-Latin texts should be reproducible by typewriters or other devices having only Latin characters and a few additional signs (diacritical, etc.).

It is a question of representing characters or signs, not sounds—and this is what distinguishes transliteration from transcription—a matter of representing characters as they are written, rather than according to their phonetic or etymological values. Transliteration generally can, and should, be automatic, so that it can be done by anyone able to identify the language of the original; and it should be possible for anyone with an adequate knowledge of this language to re-establish the text in its original characters.*

There should be no ambiguity: a given character or sign should always be transliterated·consistently and, in principle, a single character in one alphabet should always correspond to a single character in the other(s). The use of two letters for a single character is acceptable only when the Latin alphabet offers no other reasonable possibility (e.g. Cyrillic Щ and Greek Ψ), and then it should be a two-letter combination ruling out any ambiguous interpretation.

Diacriticals are added when necessary, but signs not available on (for instance) Latin-alphabet typewriter keyboards are used as little as possible.

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* For Arabic, which is usually written in an incomplete way (without vowels), transliteration cannot be automatic unless done from a text in which the vowels and other omitted signs have been supplied. Transliteration therefore requires a good knowledge of Arabic, and it may be necessary to use dictionaries for an indication of vowelling.

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INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM
FOR THE TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC CHARACTERS

1. CONSONANTS

No.	Arabic character	Transliteration into Latin character	No.	Arabic character	Transliteration into Latin character
1	ـَ	see Note 1	16	ض	ḍ
2	ا	see Note 2	17	ط	ṭ
2a	آ	ā initially; 'ā elsewhere	18	ظ	ẓ
3	ب	b	19	ع	ʿ
4	ت	t	20	غ	ḡ
5	ث	ṯ	21	•(ڢ) ف	f
6	ج	ğ	22	•(ف) ق	q
7	ح	ḥ	23	ك	k
8	خ	ẖ	24	ل	l
9	د	d	25	م	m
10	ذ	ḏ	26	ن	n
11	ر	r	27	ه	h
12	ز	z	27a	ة	see Notes 8 and 13
13	س	s	28	و	w (see also No. 31 and Notes 1, 3 and 14)
14	ش	š	29	ي	y (see also No. 32 and Notes 1, 3 and 14)
15	ص	ṣ			

• The letters in brackets are the Maghrebi forms.

2. VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS

No.	Characters		Characters		Characters		Characters	
	Arabic	Latin	Arabic	Latin	Arabic	Latin	Arabic	Latin
30	＿	a	اٰ ＿ (ىٰ ＿)	ā (à)	اً ＿ ً	an		
31	＿	u	وُ ＿	ū	ٌ ＿	un see Note 10	وَ ＿	aw
32	＿	i	يِ ＿	ī	ٍ ＿	in	يَ ＿	ay

3. OTHER CONVENTIONAL SIGNS

No.	Arabic designation	Arabic character	Transliteration
33	sukūn	·	ignored in transliteration
34	šadda^h	w	rendered by doubling the consonant
35	hamzaᵗ al-waṣl (alif waṣla^h)	ٱ	see Notes 9 and 11

A. GENERAL NOTES

Note	Arabic character	Position	Transliteration	Examples
1	Hamza^h	a) initially	not transliterated	amīn
		b) initially	may be transliterated as ‿, where necessary to distinguish from hamsaʿ al-wasl ̣ see Notes 9 and 11	ʼamīn
		c) elsewhere	rendered by ‿	fuʼād
		d) ‍ا , ى and و when bearers of hamza^h	not transliterated	ra'à, li'am, su'al
2	Alif	having a purely orthographical value	not transliterated see No. 2 a) and 30 and Notes 9 and 11	mi'a^h; faʿalū
3	و and ي	with šadda^h, even after the vowels u and i, respectively.	always transliterated ww and yy	bawwāb, quwwād, bayyāʿ
4	ال	a) definite article	assimilated with "sun" letters: ت ث د ذ ر ز س ش ص ض ط ظ ل ن	aš-šams^u
		b) in ahadtu and ̲ similar words	assimilation is not shown	
5	Hyphen		used in transliteration to separate grammatically differing elements within single units of Arabic script, notably the noun from the article and/or from the particles wa-, fa-, ta-, bi-, li-, ka-, la-, sa- and a-.	wa-bi-šaraf
6	Following letters used in Arabic to represent non-Arabic sounds: پ ج ژ ڤ پ ۋ ک ݣ		transliterated as follows: p č ž v g	