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Equivalence of proper nouns in Russian and Czech: proper nouns in translation : summary

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11 SUMMARY

Equivalence of Proper Nouns in Russian and Czech: Proper Nouns in Translation

This treatise investigates the transfer of proper nouns between Czech and Russian, a field that is often ignored by Czech and Russian linguists. There exists no in-depth study that offers practical hints or advice as to how to deal with proper nouns in a foreign text. This results in discrepancies in the transfer of proper nouns including wrong solutions that can considerably impact effective communication.

By gathering and analyzing both secondary and primary sources (Czech and Russian fiction and newspaper articles), I summarized methods used for the transfer of Russian proper nouns into Czech and vice versa.

The methods for transferring Russian proper nouns into Czech and vice versa proposed in this work are divided into several categories: form-based methods (practical and phonetic transcription, transliteration, graphic transplantation), content-based methods (calque, semantic explication, substitution, de-onymization), localization-based methods (euphonic adaptation of the target language, limited variability, semantic explication, adaptation, substitution and transposition) and exotization-based methods (transcription, graphic transplantation, use of default units). The methods are described in detail, and their proper (or improper) use is supported by examples from the press, online media and fiction.

One objective of the present work is to find out which method is best suited to deal with different kinds of proper nouns and whether it is possible to generalize and recommend the use of a certain method for specific kinds of proper nouns and text genres. Having analyzed concrete examples and methods

of transfer, I concluded that the high level of variability of transfer that is so common in this field does not necessarily imply an error, as the selection of the right method of transfer is closely dependent on the function and focus of the target text. On the other hand, erroneous examples show that translators and other users of language are not always able to assess the function of the text correctly and assign the best-suited method of transfer. This work could therefore contribute to achieving greater consistency in the use of foreign proper nouns. Its second part provides recommendations for the most suitable methods of transfer for specific types of proper nouns (chrematonyms, bionyms, geonyms) in various types of texts.

A related aim of this work is to evaluate and describe the most common methods of transcription and transliteration and make them accessible. During my analysis of these methods, it became clear that the existing rules of practical transcription from Czech to Russian are rather imperfect, and the criticized variability and inconsistency of transcription is caused by these very rules, which are unclear and unsuitable altogether. In co-operation with the Russian proper-nouns expert D. I. Yermolovich and the Czech linguist J. Gazda, we thoroughly revised and updated the transcription of some characters.

The most important changes concern the transcription of Czech characters *l* and *y*, whose present transcription is the most questionable. The core of the problem of transcribing the character *y* lies in the fact that the pronunciation of the two graphemes *i*, *y* (*lat.*) is the same: we have two graphemes representing a single phoneme. Most translators-onomasticians tend to transcribe both *i*, *y* by means of a single Russian grapheme, *u* (*cyr.*). However, modern communication largely takes place in writing, which makes the preservation of the written form of the proper noun all the more important. Therefore, many translators occasionally transcribe the Czech character *y* as *ы*, regardless of the rules. A similar problem concerns the transcription of the Czech phone [l], which does not correspond to the Russian soft [ль] nor [л]. Czech *l* is always pronounced the same, irrespective of its position within the word. There are several contradicting opinions as to whether the soft sign should be added or not. This issue has the highest proportion of divergences (*Телл, Телль, Телль, Телль; Пльзень, Плзень; Влтава, Влтава*), which is a consequence of the fact that all existing rules concerning *l* are either self-contradictory or do not correspond to either Czech or Russian pronunciation. We therefore propose to update the transcription method for the Czech letter *y* by using *ы* instead of *и* in Russian and to transcribe Czech *l* exclusively as *л*. This quite radical proposal to change well-established rules originates from the need to replace rules that are not fit for purpose. The current rules frequently fail to reflect the correct pronunciation of both Czech and Russian; they are not intuitive and they break Czech and Russian grammatical rules. This calls for a large number of exceptions, as it is impossible to transcribe a proper noun by using

the transcription charts provided, and the actual term often has to be looked up in an encyclopedia or dictionary.

The proposed changes (new transcription rules from Czech to Russian) were discussed with both Russian and Czech experts and are summed up in the Chart of Practical Transcription from Czech into Russian (Appendix 2). They reflect the research carried out in connection with this work and, in my opinion, they can also simplify and improve the current system of transcription. The chart can also serve as a basis for further research or larger debate among Czech and Russian linguists. As any potential general acceptance of the new rules will certainly take time, however, the enclosed table of transcription rules from Czech to Russian frequently provides two possible options according to the “old” and “new” rules. In my opinion, the updated rules for the practical transcription of Czech into Russian simplify and upgrade the system (for more details please see chap. 5.1.1).

Besides the updated chart, I have produced another chart comparing the transcription of Russian into Czech and Russian into English (Appendix 1). Most common transliteration charts can be found in Appendices 3, 4, 5a and 5b.

The proposed methods for transferring foreign proper nouns is then applied to various proper nouns that are divided into three groups (chrematonyms, bionyms and geonyms, chapters 6, 7, 8). Again, I support my recommendations with examples and I try to provide as much information as possible as I deem it necessary to resolve some problematic issues.

Chrematonyms differ from other kinds of proper nouns in terms of the importance of preserving the meaning of the lexical unit (the so-called appellativeness of chrematonyms, i.e. their proximity to common nouns), which is rather undesirable in the case of other proper nouns. Chrematonyms therefore often require methods that focus on meaning, especially calque and substitution. In the case of logonyms (company names), I also mention the problems of transferring accompanying elements that do not necessarily stand for proper nouns but relate to them closely, e. g. indications of the legal status of a company or problems of the use of quotation marks (or lack thereof) in this kind of names.

The largest group among bionyms are the anthroponyms. Their transfer is problematic and influenced by extralingual factors. Transfer into Czech is problematic especially for the convention of adding suffixes *-ová* to foreign female surnames. I try to determine whether it is right and appropriate to transfer e. g. the Russian surname *Кузнецова* as *Kuzněcovová*, *Kuzněcova* or *Kuzněcová*; *Цветаева* as *Cvetajevová* or *Cvetajeva*. The adaptation of Czech surnames into Russian is also problematic because the transcription rules suggest the adaptation of Czech surnames ending in *-ský*, *-cký*, *-ská*, *-cká*, whilst others ending in *-ý*, *-á* only should not be adapted. Some translators tend to adapt even these (*Tichý* as *Tuxu* or *Tuxuŭ*; *Světlá* as *Светла* or *Светлая*). Another problem lies in names whose form of surname

does not correspond to the nationality of the bearer. How should we transcribe, for example, the surname *Кюхельбекер* into Czech? As *Kjuchelbeker* or *Küchelbecker*? *Шнитке* will be *Šnitke* or *Schnitke*? These and further problems are involved in the transfer of anthroponyms, and it is not always possible to determine a correct transfer method. I have taken all benefits and disadvantages into account in order to suggest the most suitable option.

The largest group among geonyms are the toponyms. They are transcribed most often (even though a calque does not constitute an exception), but their spelling poses a problem: Czech and Russian recording standards for toponyms differ significantly. I therefore provide a list of orthographic rules for transferring Czech toponyms into Russian and vice versa, which must be taken into consideration. Hyphens in the names of towns (*Чески-Крумлов*) and the different distribution of capital letters are difficult to adapt into Czech. Apart from orthographic rules, I also solve the problems of translating nominative lexis (words such as lake, sea, street, big), which sometimes occurs in toponyms. As with chrematonyms and toponyms, I mentioned the translation of appellative lexis that accompanies toponyms. Using the example of *Ленинградский район*, I analyze the possibilities of translating names of administrative units in the Czech Republic and Russian Federation (e. g. the terms *kraj, okres, obec; республика, область, край, район, населённый пункт* and others.)

I hope that this treatise will be useful to translators, scholars of both Russian and Czech studies, journalists, travel agents and others who work with texts of international character containing Russian and Czech proper nouns. I did my best to elaborate the problems of transferring proper nouns exhaustively and take into consideration all relevant factors, but it currently seems impossible to achieve this objective completely due to the vast extent of the topic and a lack of other relevant literature. Writers of all kinds should bear in mind that the ultimate solution always depends on the type of their text, specific conditions, factors influencing its creation and, last but not least, their lingual feeling. Having considered all of this carefully, anyone is entitled to choose their preferred transfer method, even if it contradicts recommendations provided in this book.