Translating Urbanonyms: Issues and Suggestions for the Improvement of Linguistic Landscape

Marina GOLOMIDOVA\(^1\) and Oleg SHCHERBAKOV\(^2\)

\(^1\)Department of Branding and Integrated Marketing Communications, Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia
\(^2\)Department of Foreign Languages, Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia

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Abstract. The study investigates the language difficulties of the Linguistic Landscape (LL) optimization for the establishment of a convenient system of navigation for foreign tourists in Russian Federation. The authors discuss the approaches to translating Russian urbanonyms into the English language. Particular attention is paid to existing evaluation guidelines for the translation of urbanonyms. The study reveals a systemic approach in translation as well as errors and inconsistent practical implications resulted in Linguistic Landscape of different cities. The results on the analysis of the translated urbanonyms implemented during the preparation for 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia (Ekaterinburg) are reported to give the evaluation of weaker and stronger translations in terms of unimpeded communication. Of special importance are difficult cases of translation where the authors suggest alternative solutions.

1. Introduction

A study of a city as a communicative space is among the topical avenues of humanitarian research and there is a mounting interest towards theoretical and practical issues of formation and functioning of Linguistic Landscape (LL). This term itself came into scientific use in the end of the XX century while investigating the peculiarities of the practical, public implication of characters in bilingual and multilingual cities [1]. Linguistic Landscape is basically defined as follows: “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the LL of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.” [2] At present both Russian and foreign linguists study issues of LL [Backhaus, 2007; Ling, Wu 2013; Pusey, 2009; Torkington, 2009; Abramova, 2016]. The image of a city as well as its perception depends sensitively on quantitative and qualitative characteristics of Linguistic Landscape. The issues of efficient development of LL in Russian cities are of utmost importance for the development of tourist industry.

The attractiveness of Russia for foreign tourists is increasing, which ensued from choosing the country as a venue for international conferences, international competitions and such important events as the 27th Summer Universiade in Kazan, the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. It is noteworthy that at present regional cities of Kaliningrad, Saransk, Nizhny Novgorod and etc. are becoming more famous in the event industry, and therefore, foreign tourists are discovering new routes and directions in Russia alongside with familiar ones.

In terms of tourists’ rising interest the key problem is inventing an efficient and comprehensible system of urban navigation. Each visitor should easily fathom how to reach the place, which transport to use and etc. A foreign tourist may be willing to experience, however briefly, the quotidian routine of the local people, to see ‘how people live’—which is only possible through establishing personal contacts—in other words, through realizing the popular humanitarian values of cross-cultural communication [8]. Improving the LL for a better perception by foreigners arises from the aforementioned communication demands. However, the experience of Russian scientists in the contrivance of the comfortable LL for foreign visitors is yet to be gained.
The study aims to analyze practical solutions to translating urbanonyms into the English language. For the investigation of problem areas we have chosen the urbanonyms of Ekaterinburg translated in the course of the preparation to 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. The principle of communicative expediency serves as a major criterion of the analysis.

2. Methods

In this study we used both descriptive and comparative methods. Data were collected from more than 50 public transport stops and guide-boards. We photographed all inscriptions, but only included those of special interest to make a valid, consistent analysis. Subsequently, we elicited further examples from official websites of governmental structures (chiefly documents and guidelines); those were thoroughly studied and compared with the material already gathered.

3. Results and Discussion

A contemporaneous city is full of various denominations. Each public transport stop, all the streets, business centers and malls have their own unique names. In relation to the complex of proper nouns within an urban space T. V. Shmelyova applies the term “onomasticon of a city” [9]. Substantially, we can define all proper nouns of high frequency within a city as being part of the onomasticon of the city. Proper names of such spatial objects as streets, squares, parks, bridges, buildings, public transport stops and metro stations, districts and neighborhoods are also included. In terms of the aforementioned material, researches traditionally use the term “urbanonym” [10].

Modern science has defined several approaches to translating proper names: transcription, transliteration, transposition, loan translation, transplantation, explication [11]. Despite the detailed description of all approaches, many difficulties arise in practice. The juxtaposition of two official documents issued in Moscow and Kaliningrad during the preparation to 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia gives strong evidence of the statement. The results of the comparison are given below (Table 1).

The results of the comparison indicate that there are only several versions agree, e.g. univocal terms such as “street”, “square”, “avenue” whereas translations for “embankment”, “lane” and “alley” vary. It is noteworthy that the option “river road”, proposed in Kaliningrad, is not widely-used either in Russia or abroad. It may be also associated with the eponymous picturesque road in the USA.

To substantiate the analysis of the aforementioned translation, we will take translated versions of urban denominations made in 2018 in Ekaterinburg. Initially an attempt to propose guidelines for translators was made by E. M. Bozhko, A. O. Ilner, L. I. Korneeva [12]. Using the principles of translation and transliteration of urbanonyms made by toponymy committee of Saint-Petersburg the authors proposed the following:

- to differentiate between key and secondary urban objects;
- to use loan translation for translating key objects;
- to use full or partial transliteration while translating names of secondary objects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian Terms</th>
<th>The Recommended Versions of Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Kaliningrad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>улица</td>
<td>street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>площадь</td>
<td>square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>проспект</td>
<td>avenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>набережная</td>
<td>embankment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>переулок</td>
<td>side-street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тупик</td>
<td>blind alley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE I. Translating Urbanonyms in Moscow and Kaliningrad.
These suggestions were directed to the government of Ekaterinburg which used them as guidelines for the translation of urban objects into the English language. After 2018 FIFA World Cup we can estimate the translation quality and assess its regularity. Primarily, evaluating transformations from the qualitative point of view, it should be noted that within the city there is a plethora of public transport stops without brand new tableaux. It has a negative effect on the opinion of foreign visitors since tourists currently do not limit themselves geographically and prefer cheap hotels and apartments all over the city.

In a qualitative sense it has been established that variations of translation stated on a new tableaux do not correspond with those the officials suggested in guidelines. Our understanding comes from first-hand translation experience during large-scale events in Ekaterinburg. Taking into account the communication demands of foreign visitors it is advisable to use loan translation and partial transliteration while translating urbanonyms, regardless of the object whereabout as well as its functions. The proposed approach is also based on the principle of communicative expediency and focuses on the foreign tourist, his convenience and self-reliant navigation.

As another option we suggest using full transliteration in some cases with loan-translation given in brackets. As a rule, this allows foreign tourists to ask local people for help. However, the possibility of self-reliant navigation round the city has not been considered yet. Juxtaposing the two translation options—“Bus Station” and “Avtovokzal”—we can see that the first translation is more familiar and understandable for visitors rather than the second one. Moreover, the unification of translation in the streets, itineraries and on electronic maps will make tourists remember the name and will establish a better connection between the physical object and its mental image.

Let us turn to the informative and technical sides of translating urbanonyms in Ekaterinburg. It should be noted that guide-boards are translated in agreement with GOST (state standards of Russia). We have compared different translation variations stated in the guidelines and GOST. The results of this comparison are given below (Table 2).

As we can see, options vary. Moreover, they differ from those that were suggested in Moscow in Kaliningrad. That proves the inconsistency in translation urbanonyms.

### TABLE II. The Comparison Between Versions of Translations Stated in Guidelines and GOST.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Russian Terms</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>улица</td>
<td>street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>площадь</td>
<td>square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>проезд</td>
<td>passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>набережная</td>
<td>embankment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>переулок</td>
<td>side-street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тупик</td>
<td>blind alley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOST</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guidelines</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>street</td>
<td>street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square</td>
<td>square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drive</td>
<td>riverfront</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lane</td>
<td>court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having studied the gathered material, we divided it into several groups depending on the source-text of a given urbanonym. The spelling and punctuation of both Russian and English versions are preserved.

### 3.1 The Names of Elements of the Streets’ System

- «Софьи Ковалевской» → “Sofyi Kovalevskoy St.”;
- «Решетникова» → “Reshetnikova Dr.”;
- «Самоцветный бульвар» → “Samotsvetny Blvd.”;
- «Южный проезд» → “Yuzhny Dr.”;
- «Пл. Первой Пятилетки» → “1st Pyatiletki Sq.”;
- «Сибирский тракт» → “Sibirskiy Hwy.”;
- «пер. Рижский» → “Rizhskiy Ln.”
As it has already been mentioned before, the translation for such words as, for instance, «переулок» (lane), «проезд» (drive) may differ. Studying the guide-boards, we have collected these examples:

- «Базовый переулок» → “S. str. Bazovy”;
- «Южный проезд» → “Yuzhniy Pass.”

They support the diversity of possible translations, which causes chaos in the onomastic field of a city. For instance, the urbanonym «Южный проезд» is translated into English as “Yuzhny Dr.” and “Yuzhniy Pass.” The first option refers to the name of a public transport stop whereas the second one – to a guide-board on a street.

These examples also contain several spelling errors in Russian. According to spelling rules of the Russian language, all proper names must begin with a capital letter. The name «пер. Рижский» doesn’t follow this rule. Furthermore, due to the standards, there is not an abbreviated option for “side-street” in GOST, and it was still abbreviated to “S. str.”

### 3.2 The Names of Administrative Entities and Neighborhoods

- «ЖБИ» → “ZhBI”;
- «Академгородок» → “Akademgorodok”;
- «Вторчермет» → “Vtorchermet”;
- «Академический микрорайон» → “Akademicheskiy District”;
- «УНЦ» → “UNTs”.

Transliteration is used while translating names of districts and neighbourhoods. The only exception is the translation of «Академический микрорайон» → “Akademicheskiy District”, where translators used a combination of transliteration and loan translation. It should be noted that the Russian term for «микрорайон» is translated as district whereas we suggest using “neighborhood” or “microdistrict”, but we consider it essential to choose only one option in order to prevent inconsistency. A district is much bigger than a neighborhood, thus it is not appropriate for the Russian word «микрорайон», which is a part of a district, a small dwelling area.

In some cases we recommend to include the translated versions of urbanonyms which would ensure a better understanding of the denominations, at the same time, the loan-translated part of a name would make the whole name more comprehensible for local people, e.g. “ZhBI Neighborhood”.

### 3.3 The Names of Enterprises and Institutions

- «ТЦ Современник» → “Sovremennik Shopping Centre”;
- «ТРК Глобус» → “Globus Mall”;
- «ТРЦ ФанФан» → “Fan-Fan Mall”;
- «ТЦ Диржабль» → “Dirizhabl Shopping Centre”;
- «Супермаркет Кировский» → “Kirovskiy Supermarket”;
- «Шарташский рынок» → “Shartashkiy Rynok”;
- «Областной рынок» → “Oblastnoy Rynok”.

As concerns this group of denominations, we have noted an inconsistency in translating urbanonyms. There are two options chosen for translation: “shopping centre” and “mall”, but sometimes they do not correspond with the reality. The criterion of distinguishing a shopping centre from a mall is its size and the range of provided services. A mall would be bigger and would suggest its customer a greater variety of shops, entertainment facilities, etc. Furthermore, malls are aimed at the population of a whole region or, at least, of a city, whereas a shopping centre is targeted at the customers living in the proximity. There is a tendency of confusing the terms. For example, we believe it would be better to translate «ТРЦ ФанФан» as Fan-Fan Shopping Centre taking into account the pragmatic side of the translation, which would help to make the object more ‘realistic’ for a foreigner.
In this group we also include names of public transport stops derived from market names. However, the Russian equivalent for market is transliterated everywhere (рынок → rynok). We suggest using the term market in brackets, e.g. “Shartashkiy Rynok (Market)”. For the record, the Russian translation of public transport stops’ names containing the names of the aforementioned objects are not placed in inverted commas which contradict the rules of the Russian language.

3.4 The Names of Public Health Centres
- «Микрохирургия глаза» → “Mikrokhirurgiya Glaza”;
- «Горбольница № 6» → “Gorbolnitsa No.6”;
- «Поликлиника» → “Poliklinika”;
- «Диагностический центр» → “Diagnosticheskiy Tsentr”.

The importance of loan translation concerning the names of facilities in this group is obvious, e.g. “Poliklinika (Health Centre)”, “Gorbolnitsa No.6 (Municipal Hospital No.6)”. In case of emergency, foreigners would easily find a health care institution.

3.5 The Names of Education Clusters
- «Автомобильный колледж» → “Avtomobilny College”;
- «Артиллерийский институт» → “Artillery Institute”; 
- «ПедунIVERSITET» → “Pedagogical University”;
- «Техучилище» → “Tekhuchilishche”.

The proper names of this group are translated and loan-translated. Sometimes both methods were used together. We believe using loan-translated versions in brackets should follow the previously mentioned logic as they would seem more familiar to the local people.

The Russian word «Техучилище» and its loan-translated version “Tekhuchilishche” are difficult for pronunciation due to the clusters of voiceless and sibilant consonants, some of which do not exist in the English language. We suggest an alternative option: “Technical Specialized School (Tekhuchilishche)”.

The analysis of the aforementioned proper names and their translations proves that:
- translators do not always consider the phonetics of the translated word and the pronunciation of Russian abbreviations. As a consequence, some names are challenging for pronunciation and understanding. As a result, the self-reliant navigation becomes rather complicated;
- there is a plethora of mistakes in both Russian and English versions. Mostly, Russian proper names are not placed in inverted commas;
- transliteration and loan translation are two major methods used in all cases.

4. Conclusion
Currently urbanonyms translation is of utmost importance. As the analysis of Ekaterinburg experience showcases, even within a city the translation of the same denominations may differ. That proves the absence of any systemic approach. The reasons may lie in the insufficiency of comparative research both in theoretical and practical realms. We therefore suggest setting unified standards of translation with universal English for all Russian cities. Following those rules countrywide, specialists would create comfortable LL, which would have a positive effect on attracting tourists from all over the world.

We believe, the results of this study would encourage comparative analyses in other regions of Russia and other countries. They can also be considered during the preparation for international events, e.g. WorldSkills Kazan 2019, global exhibitions in Moscow and etc.

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