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SOME PROBLEMS OF THE RENDERING OF GEOGRAPHICAL
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SOME PROBLEMS OF THE RENDERING
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES FROM
ONE SYSTEM OF WRITING INTO ANOTHER

by Rosova L.I. and Savina V.I., scientific workers,

Central Research Institute of Geodesy, Air Surveying

and Cartography.

In recent years the problem of rendering geographical names from one language into another has become of greater interest to many countries.

The convening of this International Conference on the Standardization of geographical names is a proof of this.

The Soviet Union, too, at the present time, is giving much attention to this problem. Several reasons account for this. The Soviet Union is doing a great deal of work on mapping its vast territories with their multinational population. There have appeared of late a great number of maps and atlases covering diverse areas all over the world which vary in their themes and contents. A number of cartographic works in foreign languages have been issued by the Soviet Union. Finally, there have arisen new problems connected with rendering into Russian geographical names of Asian and partly of African countries from the materials in their national scripts.

The Soviet cartography is faced with immediate problems: I/ that of rendering foreign names by means of the Cyrillic alphabet, which has been adopted by most of the languages in the territories of the USSR; and 2/ that of rendering foreign names into languages the scripts of which differ from the Cyrillic, such as Georgian, Armenian and the languages of our Baltic Republics.

In this report we shall touch upon the problems of the transferring foreign names by the Russian alphabet and partly by the Roman alphabet.

To be able to solve new problems which may arise in the process of such work it is necessary to have definite rules based on the phonetic peculiarities of the language concerned, its orthography and morphology.

The most advantageous method of rendering foreign names into Russian is the so-called method of practical transcription, when only Russian letters are used and the rules of the Russian orthography are observed.

We should like to say a few words on some general problems arising while rendering names into Russian from any system of writing. These problems are the following.

As a rule, we transcribe names from the official language of the country concerned. Is it necessary in this case to consider the other important languages that the people of the country speak, e.g. the Dravidian languages or Bengali in India? Our specialists answer this question in the affirmative.

Which is the correct way to transcribe: to render only the phoneme in question or to render sometimes its variants dependant on the posi- tion of the phoneme in the word? E.g. in Persian names the letter ق represents a fricative uvular consonant and is generally pronounced /γ/, but before vowels it carries the value of /k/, that is, it becomes explosive. We consider that the rendering of phonemes is preferable because of their semantic value.

And finally, is it practical while transcribing to preserve, to some extent, the "graphical image" of a name, sometimes ignoring its pronunciation. Shall we write Рейлинген or Райлинген (Germ. Reilin- gen); Албешти or Албешть (Ruman. Albeşti)?

We believe the "graphical image" should be taken into consideration.

There is still another rather complicated problem, that of dialects. Shall some dialectal differences that are peculiar to the toponymy of certain regions of the country concerned be reflected when rendering names into other languages? Shall we ignore them if they are not fixed in national spelling? E.g. the Arabic character ح usually represents the sound /dʒ/ (as in jury), but in the UAR and some regions of Sudan it carries the value of /g/ (as in get). We think it practical to reflect such phenomena though the national spelling does not distinguish them.

The problem of whether compound place-names should be written separately or in one is typical of all the languages too. Shall we follow the spelling of the original or work out a set of rules of our own? If we follow the originals we are often unable to render similar word-structures consistently. It happens so because one and the same compound name may be written in different ways in the national materials. E.g. German names with the words "klein, groß, neu, alt, ober, nieder" and others are written both separately and in one. Different is the spelling of the identical English names: Bearpaw and Bear Paw.

It seems to us that it is necessary to have strict rules for rendering similar names irrespective of their spelling in the original, because morphologically similar structures should be transferred identical-ly.

The problem of transferring geographical terms is as complicated. Shall generic terms be transcribed or translated? As is known, in some languages generic terms precede proper names, e.g., Lac de Grandlieu in French, رأس الملح /Ras el Milh/ in Arabic; in other languages they come

after proper names, e.g. Baba burnu, Ak Dağ in Turkish; and still in
other both positions are possible, e.g. رود شور /Rud-i-Shur/, سفید کوه
/Safid Kuh/ in Persian, महानन्दा नदी /Mahananda Nadi/, भील डेबर
/Jhil Debar/ in Hindi. In addition proper names and the generic terms
related to them may be written both separately and in one, such occasions
being possible within one and the same language. All this considerably
complicates the solution of the problem of whether geographical terms
should be translated or transcribed.

We consider it possible to solve this problem in the following way.

If the geographical term is the integral element of a name (and we
always consider it integral in cases when the specific part is expressed
by an adjective or a numeral) it should be transcribed. E.g.: Schwarz
Bach (Germ.) - р.Шварц-Бах , महा नदी (Hindi) - р. Маханади,
کوه سبز (Urdu) - г. Кохе-Сабз , Üçada (Turkish) - о-ва Учада,
Μεγάλο Βουνό (Greek) - г. Мегало-Вуно.

If the specific part is expressed by a noun, a combination of two
nouns or a combination of a noun and an adjective, the geographical
term stops being integral and turns into a generic term . In such cases
it should be translated. E.g. Кӯҳи Бобоиоб (Tadjik) - г. Бобоиоб,
Victoria Desert (English) - пуст.Виктория , स्वर्णरेखा नदी
(Hindi) - р. Сварнарекха , कैमूर की पहाड़ियाँ (Hindi) - горы Каймур,
برده کا تالاب (Urdu) - пруд Бардха , Baie de St. Brieuc
(French) - бухта Сен-Бриё , Baba burnu (Turkish), - м. Баба.

Especially difficult is the problem of transferring noun flexions
in genetive constructions consisting of a combination of a generic and
a specific parts. There are several ways of solving this problem:

1/ the term is translated and the nominative of the proper name
is used, e.g. Burtnieku ezers /Latvian/ - оз. Буртниеки;

2/ the term is translated and the genetive form of the proper name
is retained, e.g. Dagdas ezers /Latvian/ - оз. Дагдас;

3/ the whole construction is transcribed and a Russian generic term
is added, e.g. Puzes ezers /Latvian/ - оз. Пузес-Эзерс.

Unfortunately opinions on the problem differ. In our practice all
the three methods are used.

All these general problems are very complicated, there are different
points of view of how to solve them and it seems to us that an exchange
of opinions would be useful.

Further, we should like to touch upon some special problems which
are to be solved when rendering names into Russian from certain systems
of writing, such as

I) alphabetical writing in its two varieties: a) all the sounds,
both vowels and consonants, are represented in the alphabet (the Greek,
Roman, Cyrillic, Georgian, Armenian alphabets and the Korean alphabet-
kunmun) and b) only consonants are represented in the alphabet (the
Arabic, Hebrew alphabets), 2) syllabic script (the Burmese, Thai, Laothian,
Khmer, Devanagari and other kinds of Indian script; the Japanese official
alphabet - kana) and 3) idiographic script (the Chinese and Japanese
script).

Some of the above-mentioned systems have been in use in cartography
for a long time (the Roman, Cyrillic and partly Arabic alphabets and
idiographic script), others have been used occasionally (the Devanagari
and various kinds of writing used in Indochina); and still others have not

yet been used at all (the systems of writing based on the Indian
ayllabic script and used in India side by side with the Devanagari,
as well as the Amharic script).

The authentic forms of foreign names may be established only with
the help of national maps at hand. That is why the absence of national
cartography in a number of countries and especially the absence of
national alphabets in some African languages hinder work.

The way of transferring the geographical names of Africa with its
great number of complicated languages via English, French or Italian
transcription is inadequate. That is why the efforts of the linguists
of some countries of West Africa in creating national alphabets should
be appreciated.

The rendering of names from any system of writing poses a set
of problems. They exist even when the language rendered into and the
language of the original have the same alphabet. For instance, in order
to render Belorussian and Ukrainian toponyms into Russian we find it
convenient to use a special method - the method of morpheme replacement,
which is justified by the close affinity of these languages: Belorussian
and Ukrainian suffixes and flexions are replaced by the corresponding
Russian ones, e.g. Барысаў (Belorussian) - Борисов , Глухів (Ukr.)-
Глухов , and the replacement of the corresponding sounds in the roots
takes place.

This method is partly used in rendering other slavic toponyms,
e.g. Polish and Czech adjectives ending in - i, - a and -ý, -á
respectively sometimes appear in Russian in the form of Russian
adjectives: Wyżyna Małopolska - Малопольская возвышенность,
Bródnowski Kanał - Брудновский канал   , Muránsky Kras - Муранский карст
and so on.

There also exist certain difficulties in rendering geographical names even from the languages using alphabets based on the Cyrillic. These difficulties are mainly connected with the absence of special letters in the Russian alphabet for designating certain sounds that exit in other languages. It especially concerns such languages as the Caucasian languages which have a complex system of sounds rendered into Russian only approximately. In addition, the matter is complicated by the fact that in the alphabets of the languages of the Western and Eastern Caucasus there are several ways of designating approximately similar sounds, e.g. the explosive guttural sibilant affricate is usually indicated by "чI" in all the Caucasian languages but by "кI" in Adygej. There are cases when one and the same letter represents different sounds in the same language, e.g. the letters " 3 " and " ж " may represent either the fricative sounds /z/ , as in "freeze", and /ʒ/ , as in "pleasure", or the affricates /dz/ , as in "goods", and /dʒ/, as in "just". Double consonants in different Nakh-Daghestan languages may designate both non-aspirate sounds and two consonant sounds of the same value.

All this makes it necessary that special rules for practical transcription even from the languages using the Cyrillic should be worked out.

When rendering names from variants of Roman writing one should keep in mind that the Roman alphabet adapted to different languages has a limited number of letters. That is why various diacritical marks have been added to some letters in order to indicate the specific sounds of the language concerned. Besides, one and the same letters may be assigned different sound values or a combination of letters is used for a single sound. In connection with this it should be noted that a

thorough knowledge of any language, its phonetics and orthography is
required when rendering names.

The rendering of names from the languages with historically tradi-
tional spelling, such as English, French etc. is particularly difficult.
In this case special phonetic dictionaries which give the pronunciation
of proper names are of great help. They are "Everyman's English Pronounc-
ing Dictionary" by Daniel Jones for Great Britain; "A Pronouncing Dictio-
nary of American English" by John Samuel Kenyon and Thomas Albert Knott
for the USA; "Dictionnaire Phonétique de la langue française" by Barbeau-
Rodhe for France etc.

In rendering names from maps in Arabic script the main difficulties
are caused by the absence of marks for short vowels as well as tashdid,
sukun and hamza. Therefore, it would be most useful if the specialists
of the countries which issue maps in Arabic script enclosed indexes of the
names transcribed in Roman. It would considerably facilitate the rendering
of these names into other systems of writing. As an example the ten-volume
"Dictionary of the Place Names of Iran " issued in Tehran in 1949-1952

/ ۱۳۳۱-۱۳۲۸   تهران . جلد ۱ - ۱۰ . ایران فرهنگ جغرافیائی /,

may be cited. It contains the Roman transcription of almost all the names
it embraces.

The difference between the phonetic systems of the Arabic language
and the languages whose writing systems are based on the Arabic alphabet,
as well as in the case of Roman writing, has brought about the introduc-
tion of additional letters into the alphabets of some languages, e.g:

گ ، ژ ، چ ، پ in Persian, and the provision of some Arabic letters
with diacritical marks, e.g. پ, ہ, پ, ڼ, ځ , څ (خ)   in Pushtu,
ط, ڑ, ڈ in Urdu etc. In addition one and the same sound in these
languages may be represented by different characters e.g. ذ , ز , ض , ظ
for the sound /z/ in Persian.

All this should be taken into consideration when rendering names from the Arabic script.

For many years the geographical names of India on our maps have been transferred from the materials in English. However, after Hindi in the Devanagari writing has been declared the state language of India and the first cartographic materials in Hindi have appeared, e.g. "The National Atlas of India", issued in 1957

/ भारत राष्ट्रीय एटलस. प्रारम्भिक तत्त्वकरण . भारत सरकार शिक्षा और वैज्ञानिक अनुसंधान सत्राल्य शिव प्रसाद चटर्जी . कलिकात , देहरादून /,

it has become possible to begin rendering Indian place-names directly from Hindi. At the same time one can't desregard the other important and widely-spoken languages of the country, such as Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamili etc. Therefore, in addition to the existing rules of rendering names from Hindi, new rules are being prepared by our specialists, rules which will make it possible to transcribe correctly the names of those states whose population does not speak Hindi. However,no consistent rules can be worked out before cartographic materials in local languages have appeared.

As is well known, the Indian syllabic system gave rise to other systems of writing widely used in South-East Asia, such as the Burmese, Thai, Laothian writings etc. As the majority of the languages employing these systems of writing are cognate, it is necessary, when preparing rules for rendering from them, that one should treat equally such problems as the reflexion of aspiration of consonants, the choice between transcription or translation for rendering geographic terms, the writing of compound names etc.

In rendering names from Chinese idiographic writing the fact that one and the same character may be read in several different ways presents quite a problem. Such cases occur even in the Pekinese pronunciation on which our transcription in based.

When rendering Japanese place-names in idiography from Japanese maps and atlases one has to resort to special reference materials where these names are transferred into Japanese syllabic writing - kana or into Roman. One has to do so because the pronunciation of the characters in Japanese geographic names often differs from their present generally accepted pronunciation.

Special rules are to be observed when rendering Armenian, Georgian and Greek names from materials in the national languages and Korean names from the national writing - kunmun. These are the main points of the problem of rendering foreign names into Russian.

Apart from these problems is the problem of transferring names from languages that have no alphabets of their own. In our opinion, they should be fixed in writing by means of the alphabet of the most kindred language and transcribed according to the existing rules.

As has been mentioned above, at present we have to issue maps and atlases not only in Russian but in the languages with Roman and other systems of writing. This, in its turn, makes it urgent that some methods that may help solve new problems should be created. In working out these methods we believe that whatever valuable information has been accumulated by all countries should be made use of.

When making maps in Roman we consider that the place-names of the countries using the Roman alphabet should be written as they are written in their own countries, diacritical marks and all.

When rendering names from non-Roman writings into Roman we think it advisable to transliterate them by Latin characters in accordance with the system of transliteration in use in the country concerned.

Thus, the place - names of the Soviet Union should be rendered in accordance with the system of transliteration of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR; the place-names of Bulgaria in the system of transliteration of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; the place - names of China in the official Roman writing of the country, etc. The Roman writing used in international editions, e.g. the RGS II system for the place - names of India, Iran, the Arab countries etc. might be used as well. As far as the rendering of names into other systems of writing is concerned, e.g. into Arabic, much is to be done in this respect in future and the main thing is that a special system of rendering should be wroked out.

Now that the economic, scientific and cultural relations among various countries have considerably extended, the work on rendering names from one system of writing into another has become of still greater importance.

That this work be more fruitful it is necessary, in our opinion,

I. that an exchange of information among various countries on rendering geographic names take place, which is to help solve problems of both their national and international standardisation;

2. that national orthography in a number of countries be put in order, particularly the orthography of proper names;

3. that cartography be developed on the basis of the main local languages with their own national alphabets.