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

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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 Standardiza-
tion 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: 1/ that
of rendering foreign names by means of the Cyrillic alphabet, which
has been adopted by most of the languages in the territori-
es 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 position of the phoneme in the word? E.g. in Persian names the letter ٧ represents a fricative uvular consonant and is generally pronounced /γ/, but before vowels it carries the value of /κ/, 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 Рейлинген (Germ.Reilin- gen); Албешти or Албешть (Roman. Albeştii)?
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 ֶ is usually represents the sound /dʒ/ (as in jury), but in the UAR and some regions of Sudan it carries the value of /ɡ/ (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 identically.

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., Lasc de Grandlieu in French, رأس آل /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. سَفِيرُوَت /Rud-i-Shur/
/Safid Kuh/ in Persian, पहाड़ नदी /Mahananda Nadi/, जिल देबर
/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.: Schwaars
Bach (Germ.) - р.Шварц-Бах, नदी नदी (Hindi) - р. Маханади,
قَرْنِ (Urdu) - г. Кохе-Сабз, Üçada (Turkish) - o-ва Учада,
Μεγάλο Βουνό (Greek) - г. Мегало-Буно.

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. Күдү Бобоиоб (Tadjik) - г. Бобоиоб,
Victoria Desert (English) - пуст.Виктория, विक्टोरिया नदी
(Hindi) - р. Сварнарекха, फ़ूल की पहाड़ीया (Hindi) - горы Каймур,
بردег ٹال پن (Urdu) - пруд Барджа, Baie de St. Étienne
(French) - бухта Сен-Бриё, Baba burnu (Turkish), - м. Баба.

Especially difficult is the problem of transferring noun flexions
in genitive 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 genitive 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

1) 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—кунмун) 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 — кана) 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 Koman, 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 syllabic 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 ВОЗЫШЕННОСТЬ, Bródnovski Kanal – Брудновский канал, Burgánská Kraj – 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 'ч' in all the Caucasian languages but by 'к' in Adygej. There are cases when one and the same letter represents different sounds in the same language, e.g. the letters "ч" and "х" may represent either the fricative sounds /s/, 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 traditional 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 Pronouncing Dictionary" by Daniel Jones for Great Britain; "A Pronouncing Dictionary 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 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 introduction of additional letters into the alphabets of some languages, e.g:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{ب، چ، ز، ژ} & \text{ in Persian, and the provision of some Arabic letters with diacritical marks, e.g. } \text{ت، چ، خ، خ (خ)} & \text{ in Fushnu,} \\
\text{پ، ٹ، ٹ} & \text{ in Urdu etc. In addition one and the same sound in these languages may be represented by different characters e.g. } \text{ز، ژ، چ، چ} & \text{ for the sound } /z/ \text{ in Persian.}
\end{align*} \]
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, it has become possible to begin rendering Indian place-names directly from Hindi. At the same time one can't disregard 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 is 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 worked 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, 

1. 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 standardization;

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.