Intermediary translation from English as a lingua franca

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ABSTRACT: The paper raises the question of intermediary translation from English as a lingua franca in communication between people belonging to Russian and East Asian cultures. This type of translation faces the controversy of two tendencies – a long-standing tradition of direct translation recommended by the Russian School of Orientalism and a tendency to follow English–Russian correspondences due to the fact that Asian loans have a Romanized form in English texts. To date, the solution to the controversy is seen in the registers applied to the text – in formal texts orientalist tendency prevails, while in informal everyday speech English-like ways of rendering Romanized Asian loans dominate.

INTRODUCTION

With English serving as a lingua franca in the Expanding Circle countries like Russia, the interdisciplinary studies of contact linguistics, theory of cross-cultural communication, and translation/interpretation theory are developing a new approach, new strategy and tactics to a number of problems raised in the framework of these disciplines. In this paper I use the term English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) following the definition given by Jenkins (2004–5: 9): EFL is “the English that is used as a contact language among speakers who come from different first language and cultural background.” This term, rather than Lingua Franca English (LFE) proposed by Kirkpatrick (2004), stands in a row with other widely used terms and their abbreviations: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Native Language (ENL), English as an International Language (EIL), English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL), English as an International and Intranational Language (EIIL) (Smith, 1983).

As the impact of English on other languages of the world is now incontrovertible, the contact linguistics, bordering on the so-called interlinguistics, has to focus primary attention on world Englishes resulting from language contacts, their peculiarities, functions, language mixing and borrowings.

The theory of cross-cultural communication has to take it into consideration that people using ELF are usually alien to the English-speaking cultures and endow the English language they use with features reflecting their own cultures, thus bringing in communicative and behavioral misunderstandings. Culture bumps can multiply due to confusing ELF with ENL of the Inner Circle or EIL, i.e., the language “used by different nations to communicate with each other” (Smith, 1983: 7–11), for the latter definition includes all types of world Englishes – including those of native speakers – used for international purposes mostly at the formal level of communication (Johnson, 1990).

The theory of translation and interpretation has also to take into account the tendencies and regularities of translating from a lingua franca, different from those of direct translating. Particular challenges for translators occur every time they have to translate from

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languages/cultures with different systems of writing, for example from Arabic or Asian cultures via English into Russian. In this paper I shall discuss the peculiarities of translating from ELF into Russian, with English functioning as a mediator between East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and Russian cultures. To use the dimensions of ELF marked as Asian Englishes that were defined by Larry Smith, the challenges of translating Asian Englishes into Russian are concerned with the concepts of intelligibility, i.e., recognition of a word, and comprehensibility, i.e., recognition of a meaning attached to a word. The third dimension, interpretability, i.e., recognition of the intent or purpose of an utterance, is rarely problematic in translating an English text about Asia (D’Angelo, 2003).

**CHALLENGES OF ELF TRANSLATION**

The Russian School of Orientalism has long-standing traditions of translation developed during direct contacts between Russian and Asian people. These traditions of direct translation have become competitive with the tendencies of translating Asian borrowings from ELF. The competition is most vivid on the phonetic level, though there are quite a number of challenges concerning writing (graphics) and meaning (semantics).

*Pronunciation problems*

English-like pronunciation seems to be becoming dominant over the traditional one derived from the orientalist tendency. According to the latter, Japanese and Korean words romanized with *sh* should be pronounced with palatalized *[s’]*[1] – thus it is recommended to render *sushi* in Russian by the Cyrillic form sounding as *[susi]*. Meanwhile, in everyday speech one can hear *[sushi]* – nowadays there are *sushi*-bars and *sushi*-restaurants in every big Russian city, the Japanese dish becoming as much a favorite with Russians as with other Westerners. The long-lasting linguistic debate about *[sushi/susi]* seems to have ended by the victory of the Englishized *sushi*. The same English-like tendency is observed in pronouncing *sashimi*, *shiitake* mushrooms, Korean *Doshirak* noodles, i.e., words used by ordinary people in everyday speech (especially in the spheres of cuisine or martial arts, which have become so popular today), whereas the standard for geographical names follows, of course, the orientalist tendency which is of longer standing: the city of Hiroshima sounds *[hirosima]* in Russian, the island of Shikoku is pronounced as *[sikoku]* etc.

A similar preference for Englishized pronunciation is evident for the words romanized with *ch*. Orientalists recommend rendering this letter combination as palatalized *[t’]* in Russian, while the popular way of pronouncing it is analogous to English *ch* (in *chip*). Thus the Japanese company names are pronounced *[Hitachi]* rather than *[Hitati]*, *[Toshiba]* rather than *[Tosiba]*; there are variations for *[Mitsubishi]* and *[Mitsubisi]*.

New words denoting new products that come from Japan and other Asian countries tend to be pronounced in an Englishized way: *tamagochi*, *pachinko*. However, though typical of new borrowings, the English-oriented tendency is not quite new – Russian knows words like *geisha*, *riksha* (<*jin-rikisha*), which sound English-like despite having been fixed in Russian dictionaries of foreign terms long ago.

Many Asian loans are borrowed by the Russian language in a written way, i.e., from Romanized form, they are associated with English spelling and are pronounced as if they

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had been borrowed from English. This accounts for a difference in transcribing the letter \( z \) in direct orientalist translation and a popular way of rendering Japanese words with \( z \) in Russian. According to the orientalist tradition, Japanese loans, containing the letter \( z \), should be rendered in Russian with a voiced affricate \([dz]\). Thus we have \([dzen-budism]\) corresponding to \( Zen-Buddhism \). However, this tendency is gradually giving way to \([z]\), like in regular English–Russian correspondences: \( zip \), \( zebra \). This is how many sportsmen tend to pronounce martial arts terms like \( waza-ari \), \( tate-zuki \), etc.

Another problem concerns Japanese loans with the letter \( j \). Russian orientalists pronounce Japanese words and their Romanized forms with the letter \( j \) through the palatalized affricate \([dz]\) (\( judo \), \( dz’udo \)) whereas non-specialists tend to render this letter as the \([dz] \) sound (cf. English \( jam \), \( jazz \)). That is why today Russian has competitive forms of pronunciation: \([dʒiu \ dz’itsu]\) and \([dz’u \ dzitsu]\) corresponding to the Romanized \( jiu-jitsu \). The former comes from Englishized spelling and the latter is a typical correspondence of the Japanese word in its traditional orientalist pronunciation.

It is difficult to say which tendency – Orientalist or English-oriented – will win. The existing norms of pronouncing Asian words still rely on long-standing orientalist tradition which is codified in textbooks and reference-books. At the same time, a linguist cannot but pay attention to the growing use of non-standard forms, though popular loans are pronounced in an English-like way because they are either associated with English due to their Romanized form or they become known to Russians from English texts, i.e., through EFL.

**Graphic problems**

Pronunciation problems are very close to graphic issues, which are most frequent for Chinese loans. Written in the Pinyin Romanization system, Chinese words have an unusual spelling – for example, \( q \) is not necessarily followed by \( u \): \( qigong \), \( qilin \). To render words like these from English (i.e., their Romanized form) into Russian, a translator must know the specific type of correspondence: while regularly the English \( q \) corresponds to the Russian \([kv]\) (\( Quaker > [kvaker] \), \( qualification > [kvalifikatsija] \)), in Chinese words borrowed in Russian the letter \( q \) corresponds to the palatalized \([ts’]\) – \( qigong \) \([ts’igun]\), \( qilin \) \([ts’i’lin’]\).

Special rules are also applied to transliterating \( x \) in Chinese words. In regular English–Russian correspondences this letter correlates with \([ks]\): \( wax \) – \([vaksa]\), \( Xerox \) – \([kseroks]\). Romanized Chinese words are transliterated with the palatalized \([s’]\): \( Xianggang \) corresponds to the Russian \([s’angan]\), \( Xinhua \) corresponds to \([s’in’hua]\), etc.

There is also discrepancy between English–Russian and Chinese–Russian correspondences with the letter \( r \). Chinese Pinyin words with this letter do not correspond to \([r]\) like in English–Russian correlates (\( radical – [radikal] \)). They are transliterated with the Russian letter sounding as \([z/zh]\) (like in \( leisure \): \( renminbi \) corresponds to \([zhen’min’bi]\); the Russian Cyrillic correlate to \( ruqun \) is \([zhuts’un’]\).

If translators are unaware of special rules of transliterating Chinese Pinyin words, they are apt to make mistakes in their transliterations. Thus, with the growing popularity of Chinese martial arts and Chinese traditional medicine, Russian bookstores are abundant with books translated from English into Russian, for instance, on \( taiji quan \) as one of the popular systems of health improvement. Without knowing the Romanized form of the
word, one can but with difficulty associate the written forms pronounced as [taidzhi chuan’], [taidzhi kvan’] with the correct form of [taitzi ts’uan’].

Special rules of correspondence are also applied to the final -n and -ng in Chinese loans – the former corresponds to the palatalized sonorant while the latter is transliterated by the non-palatalized one: *yin* & *yang* corresponds to the Russian [in’ i jan] (palatalization is a phonetically relevant feature of Russian consonants).

Irregular correspondence is characteristic of the final -ong: Russian words are closer to Wade-Giles Romanization -ung: *gongfu* (Pinyin) = *kungfu* (Wade-Giles) = [kunfu] in Russian transcription.

A particular problem is the transliteration of current Korean names from English into Russian. As is known, in 2000 the Korean government introduced a new system of Korean Romanization which turned initial voiceless consonants into voiced ones. Thus *Pusan* became *Busan*, *Taegu* became *Daegu*, *Kwangju* appears to be *Gwangju*, and *Cheju* turned into *Jeju*. While translating these names into Russian, we cannot use the technique of transcribing which is typical of geographical names, for the Russian geographical nomenclature is correlative with the old system of Korean Romanization, that of McCune-Reischauer – our maps show *Pusan*, *Taegu*, *Kwangju*, and *Cheju* (in Cyrillics).

These examples prove that intermediary translation from EFL differs from direct translation from EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Whereas in direct translation of loan words we mostly use transcription or sometimes transliteration, in intermediary translation there are special rules to be observed; otherwise the translated text may be taken for an ungrammatical one and, what is worse, for a misleading or ambiguous one.

**Semantic challenges**

When translating an English text containing loan words, it is worth remembering that word meanings are by no means stable – they go on living in a receptor language, and living means developing. Most often development of loans in the receiving language relates to the change of their meaning scope. It is not infrequent that a foreign word is borrowed only in one meaning, which becomes rather technical. The word looks like a special term with a narrow meaning, referring to a certain sphere of the word usage. For example, the Japanese word *chui*, with the original meanings ‘advice’, ‘cautiousness’, ‘attention’, has acquired an interjection meaning of ‘warning’ in the English martial fighter jargon. According to Russian linguists Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1980), this type of change of meaning in the borrowed word can be accounted for by the fact that on entering a new language a foreign word serves as a clearer symbol as compared with the native word that has developed new meanings and connotations during its cultural history.

Nevertheless, in the receiving language loans can increase the number of their meanings when applied to new contexts. I can argue against Garland Cannon (1994: 373–97), who claims that Asian loans are in strong contrast with European transfers into English in having “generally adhered to their Asian context.” He states that it is rare that Asian loans develop new meanings which are not characteristic of their original Asian word. It is not quite that. The borrowing English language has proved to become a basis for developing new meanings in a number of Asian words. For example, the Japanese word *futon*. For those who know this word in the Japanese context it implies a mattress for sleeping on the floor. However, in an American setting, futon furnishing is an alternative to a convertible
sofa. This word exemplifies that a loan can easily turn into a translator’s false friend if its meaning is not clarified by the context.

Development of meanings can lead not only to their differentiation but also to generalization. For example, the Japanese word *kamikaze*, which is now used in wider meanings, not only of a pilot who deliberately crashes his plane on enemy objectives, thus sacrificing his life, but also any person, including female terrorists, who is willing to perform a terrorist act by killing himself or herself and others, or even wider – anyone or anything that is dangerous (*kamikaze driver*, *kamikaze jobs*, *kamikaze prices*). If a translator does not take into account this fact, she or he can localize the text incorrectly, which will lead to translation mistakes and misunderstandings.

Another interesting example is the Japanese loan *kimona*. It was derived from the Japanese *kimono* ‘traditional Japanese dress’ and got a new form and meaning in American slang – ‘a Filipino female blouse’. This is also development of the word in the English language.

Metaphorical transfer of meaning takes place in set phrases like *wooden kimono*, meaning ‘coffin’. As often as not, figurative meanings of words are accompanied by special connotation. In the case of Asian words, it is not infrequently that we have ironic connotation, which is typical not only of loans but also of words coined from English roots and referring to Asian-European contacts. For example, in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Russian Far East people called Japanese prostitutes *rice-ladies*, ironically implying their social status and the staple characteristic of their everyday life (Stephan, 1994).

The above-mentioned material illustrates the semantic difficulties of intermediary translation, which can be faced by a translator hypnotized by the donor language or culture. We encounter another type of challenge when dealing with calques from Japanese, Korean or Chinese words or phrases. Without background knowledge a translator will be taken aback by such calques as *bamboo wife* (a hollow pipe to sleep with when the weather is hot), *barefoot doctor* (Chinese medical person in the rural areas, who had only limited medical training), *briefcase company* (a facilitating go-between company). Some of calques can be translated word for word – like *brainwash*, *capsule hotel*, *bamboo wife*, others require explanation and paraphrasing (*fragrant grease*, money for special service; *barefoot doctor*, *bullet train*). Having been admitted to ELF, these words and phrases either stay in it with their ethnic culture coloring or move to EIL used in a neutral context.

**CONCLUSION**

Intermediary translation is translation from a lingua franca, the language used by non-native speakers for international communication. With the global spread of English as a lingua franca, intermediary translation is considered first and foremost to be related to ELF.

To disseminate cultural information about their countries, Asian people have to transfer from their native writing systems to romanization. Romanized culture-loaded words are easily included in English texts and become loans. Translating these loans that have become part and parcel of ELF is not an easy task. A translator has to take into account two tendencies: on the one hand, the tendency of direct translation; on the other hand, English-oriented tendency, which, though having a shorter history, has a wide usage. Time will show which tendency will win. Today orthodox translators count mostly on
long-standing traditions of direct orientalist translation, which are useful not only for Asian loan translations but also for Arabic, African and other ELF.

Special rules for intermediary translation include sound and letter correlates that differ from language to language. Traditional values of letters may change in intermediary translation. That is why using ELF in the communication of people with different writing systems requires special learning.

Traditional regularities of direct translation have a domineering power in written formal translation. The tendencies of transferring words in the Englishized manner are most typical of informal translations.

When translating from ELF, it is necessary to take into account the semantic development of the word both in the intermediary language and the target language, as “false friends,” wrong interpretations of meaning, can be encountered in this type of translation as well as in direct translation.

**NOTE**

1. In transcription symbols the apostrophe indicates a palatalized consonant.

**REFERENCES**


