

Which is correct: ‘krai’, ‘region’ or ‘territory’?

Как правильно: ‘krai’, ‘region’ или ‘territory’?

Sergey V. Kazantsev^{1, 2}
С.В. Казанцев^{1, 2}¹ Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Moscow 119021, Ostozhenka 53/2, Russia. E-mail: kazantss@mail.ru¹ Дипломатическая академия МИД России, Остоженка 53/2, Москва 119021, Россия.² A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Leninsky pr. 33, Moscow 119071, Russia.² Институт проблем экологии и эволюции им. А.Н. Северцова РАН, Ленинский пр-т 33, Москва 119071, Россия.**KEY WORDS:** translation, names of Russian administrative divisions, loanwords, transliteration, transcription, calques.**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** перевод, названия российских административно-территориальных единиц, заимствование, транслитерация, транскрипция, калькирование.**ABSTRACT.** The article reviews versions of translation of names of the higher administrative divisions of the Russian Federation into English, including those by Russian governmental bodies, as well as American and English sources. It is noted that the lack of a uniform approach to translation of these names has led to the appearance of a whole array of terms for the same administrative divisions. It is suggested that a unified approach is worked out, based on the loanword practice, most common for such purposes worldwide, and the already existing set of such terms used in the English language proper.**РЕЗЮМЕ.** В статье рассматриваются варианты перевода названий единиц административно-территориального деления Российской Федерации высшего ранга на английский язык, включая варианты российских структур госуправления, а также американских и английских источников. Отмечается, что отсутствие единого подхода к переводу этих названий приводит к появлению целого спектра терминов для обозначения названий одних и тех же российских административных единиц. Предлагается унифицировать этот подход, взяв за основу широко распространённую в мире практику заимствования таких названий, а также уже сложившийся комплекс соответствующих терминов в самом английском языке.

Introduction

If we click on an English version of a Russian scientific journal or any official governmental site, we will be bewildered by an abundance of such word combinations as ‘Krasnoyarsk Krai’, ‘Krasnoyarsk Re-

gion’, ‘Krasnoyarsk Territory’ — often all on one site. How are these divisions different? Do they differ in sovereignty and regulations, or in something else? The fact is they do not differ at all; all of these names refer to the same administrative unit, rendered into English differently, at the discretion of a translator or editor. The result is rather confusing for non-Russians, who are, by the way, the target audience of such sites. So, how does the term *край* and other names of Russian administrative divisions actually translate into English?

Translation of names of Russian administrative divisions

According to the theory of translation, there are several ways to translate concepts and realities of foreign cultures that are absent in the recipient culture and language: borrowing/loanwords, with transliteration, sometimes transcription, if alphabets are different; calques, literal word-for-word or root-for-root translation; analogues, when a foreign term is translated by a similar, but more or less different term in the recipient language; hyponymy, when a specific term (hyponym) in the foreign language is translated by a generic term (hypernym) in the recipient language; and descriptive method [Lotte, 1982; Fedorov, 1983; Ilyushkina, 2015]. Names of foreign administrative divisions also belong in this group. So, let us look at how they are translated into different languages.

In the Russian language, the administrative divisions of Poland are called *воеводства*, of Great Britain — *графства*, of France — *регионы*, and of Mongolia — *аймаки* [GSE; GRE]. Of these, names of Polish, French and Mongolian divisions are loanwords, borrowed with transliteration (from Polish ‘województwo’

and French 'région'), or transcription (from Mongolian *аймаг*). The name of the British administrative division is translated into Russian by a calque from 'county': literally translating the root ('count' is *граф* in Russian) and adding the relevant suffix (*-ство*). On the other hand, the largest administrative divisions of the Chinese People's Republic are translated into Russian as *провинции* [GSE; GRE], whereas in Chinese they are called 'sheng' [Cowie, Evison, 1986]. In this case it is possibly a case of indirect borrowing, occurring though an intermediary language (English or French). So, the Russian language obviously prefers loanwords and, occasionally, calques.

Let us look at how names of administrative divisions of foreign countries are translated into the English language. The name of the Polish division in English is 'województwo', of the French one — 'region' and of the Mongolian one — 'aimak/aymag/aimag' [Encyclopedia Britannica; Merriam-Webster Dictionary; World Factbook]. The name of the Chinese administrative division in English is the mentioned above 'province', while in Chinese it is still 'sheng'. As in Russian, 'województwo', 'region' and 'aimak/aymag/aimag' are loanwords, while the name of the Chinese division ('sheng') is an analogue, translated from the source language by a similar, but having a different spectrum of meanings term of the recipient language ('province').

As we can see, borrowing, or the use of loanwords ('województwo' and 'region'), with, in case of different alphabets, transliteration/transcription ('aimak/aymag/aimag'), to translate foreign administrative divisions is the most common and widespread practice. Calques may also be used occasionally (*графство* for 'county'), as well as analogues ('province' for 'sheng'). The descriptive method is not used whatsoever, as totally unacceptable. The descriptive method would also imply describing how administrative divisions actually differ from one another — but who can tell the difference between *область* and *край*? (Some would maintain that *край* is larger, in terms of territory and/or population, but *Архангельская область* is about 9 times larger than *Ставропольский край*, and *Свердловская область* is 3 times larger than the same *Ставропольский край* and 1,5 times more populous; some would argue that *край* is less developed, but this is not the case any more either — think of *Краснодарский край*, for example).

So, the Russian Federation, too, has its own administrative divisions, its first tier ones being *область*, *республика*, *край* and (*автономный*) *округ*. While there is no problem with translation of the term *республика* into English (it is always the reverse calque 'republic'), situation with *область*, *край* and *округ* appears to be more complicated.

Let us look at the official sites of Russian Federal Agencies, i.e., their English-language versions. The official site of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia uses two versions for *область* ('oblast' and 'region'), two versions for *край* ('krai' and 'territory') and two versions for *округ* ('okrug' and 'district') [MER

RF]. The site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia suggests the same two versions for *область* and *округ* each, but three versions for *край* ('krai', 'region' and 'territory') [MID RF]. The site of the Government of Russia in its English version is more consistent and uses only one version for each term, and they are, 'region' for *область*, 'territory' for *край* and 'district' for *округ* [GOV RF], whereas the Presidential Administration of Russia, using two versions for *область* ('oblast' and 'region') and *край* ('krai' and 'territory'), opts for just one version for *округ* ('district') [President RF] (in the above examples the actual ratio of usage is hard to define, as 'region', 'territory' and 'district' are used for economic, geographical and other non-administrative divisions just as well).

Russian-English dictionaries published in the USSR/Russia mostly reflect the actual situation in the Russian practice of translation of these terms into English, suggesting two versions for *область*, *край* and *округ* as administrative divisions: 'oblast', 'krai' and 'okrug' (as the first option) and 'region', 'territory' and 'district' (as the second option) [Taube et al., 1982; Taube, Daglish, 2005].

How accurate and comprehensible would the suggested equivalents of *область*, *край* and *округ* be for native speakers in theory? The lexeme 'region' in English has a rather broad spectrum of meanings, none of which are associated with an administrative division [Cambridge Dictionary; Encyclopedia Britannica; Merriam-Webster Dictionary]; it may be regarded as a broadly defined hypernym and, being neither a borrowing nor a calque or an analogue, seems to have little chances to serve as an adequate version of translation of the term *область* or *край* as administrative divisions. 'Territory' and 'district', in their turn, although they have other meanings as well, are used as administrative divisions, and not only in the USA and Britain, but also in English-speaking Canada and Australia [Encyclopedia Britannica; Merriam-Webster Dictionary; World Factbook], and, theoretically, as analogues, have greater chances to be accepted by native speakers. On the other hand, the terms 'oblast', 'krai' and 'okrug' are loanwords, most commonly used for such purposes in the English language.

And how do the terms for Russian administrative divisions actually sound in the English language? Let us turn to English dictionaries and official sites of American and British governmental bodies. The World Factbook of the US Government lists the following administrative divisions in the Russian Federation: '46 oblasts, 21 republics, 4 autonomous okrugs, 9 krais, 2 federal cities, and 1 autonomous oblast' [World Factbook]. American Merriam-Webster Dictionary is like-minded about 'oblasts' and 'krais', although it does not have an entry about an 'okrug'; and while explaining the term 'district', quite unsurprisingly, it makes no reference to Russian administrative divisions [Merriam-Webster Dictionary].

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the USSR was divided into 'autonomous republics (*avtonomye respubliki*), autonomous provinces (*avtonomye oblas-*

ti), autonomous districts (*avtonomnye okruga*), regions (*kraya*), and provinces (*oblasti*)², but the Russian Federation is divided into oblasts, republics, autonomous okrugs, krays, federal cities, and one autonomous oblast. The term 'region' is used only with reference to economic or geographical subdivisions, such as the 'Volga, Volga-Vyatka, and Ural economic regions' [Encyclopedia Britannica]. Downing Street site is likewise clear on this matter, giving just 'oblast' and 'krai' for the relevant Russian administrative divisions [UK Government].

The use of 'province' for *область* by Encyclopedia Britannica with reference to the USSR administrative division is quite notable. The English 'province' derives from the Old French *province*, which itself comes from the Latin word 'provincia', meaning an administrative division, especially in the periphery of the empire [Merriam-Webster Dictionary], and can be perfectly attributed to any foreign administrative unit. The oblasts, the most numerous Soviet territorial divisions, technically very well suited to be called 'provinces'. However, as the term 'province' used to be applied in Russia to a second tier administrative division in the 18th century, when governorates (*губернии*) were divided into provinces (*провинции*) [GSE; GRE], using it again with reference to larger divisions may prove misleading.

Summing it up, both linguists and governmental bodies in the USA and the United Kingdom refer to the current administrative divisions of the Russian Federation as 'oblast', 'krai/krai' and 'okrug' [Merriam-Webster Dictionary; World Factbook; Encyclopedia Britannica; UK Government], although the same Encyclopedia Britannica uses, with reference to the USSR divisions, terms 'province' for *область*, 'region' for *край* and 'district' for *округ* [Encyclopedia Britannica].

Discussion

The term *область* seems to have just one appropriate equivalent, and it is the loanword 'oblast'; a possible version could be the analogue 'province', but it has not been in use in the English language with reference to Russian subdivisions since the USSR times; besides, as the term 'province' used to be referred to another type of administrative division in Russia, using it again now as an equivalent of *область* may prove misleading. The term 'region' for *область* appears to be the least appropriate of all mentioned, being a too broadly defined hypernym.

The term *край* also turns out to have just one adequate equivalent, and it is the loanword 'krai', or 'kray', as the native English speakers prefer to spell it. A possible version could be the analogue 'territory', but English language sources apparently seem to be inclined towards 'kray'.

As for the term *округ*, there seems to be actually one option as well: it is '(autonomous) okrug'. The English and American sources that do use the term, use it like this, leaving 'district' for the city, military and federal districts.

Taking into account the modern global processes, with the Internet unprecedentedly speeding up communication and putting it to a new level, it appears to be just about time to come to a consensus regarding the English names for the administrative divisions in our country. From the point of view of theoretical linguistics and practical English language usage, the appropriate English equivalents of Russian most common administrative divisions *область*, *край* and (*автономный*) *округ* would be 'oblast', 'krai/kray' and '(autonomous) okrug'.

Acknowledgements. It is my pleasant duty to express gratitude to Dr. Maria Polski (Chicago) and Dr. Irina Rusakova (Moscow) for their valuable comments on the draft version of the paper. This research was supported by Russian Science Foundation grant No 21-74-20001.

References

- Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/ru/> (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- Cowie A.P., Evison A. 1986. Concise English-Chinese, Chinese-English Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 600 p.
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Encyclopedia Britannica | Britannica (accessed on 23.12.2021).
- Fedorov A.V. 2002. Osnovy obschej teorii perevoda (Basics of general theory of translation). Fifth Edition. St-Petersburg: St-Petersburg University, Philology Tri. 416 p. [In Russian]
- [GOV RF] Official Site of the Government of Russia: Правительство России официальный сайт (government.ru) (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- [GRE] Great Russian Encyclopedia (in 36 volumes). 2004–2017. Moscow: Bolshaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya. [In Russian]
- [GSE] Great Soviet Encyclopedia (in 30 volumes). 1969–1978. Third Edition. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia. [In Russian]
- Ilyushkina M.Yu. 2015. Teoriya perevoda: osnovnye ponyatiya i problemy [Theory of translation: basic concepts and problems]. Ekaterinburg: Ural University. 84 pp [in Russian].
- Lotte D.S. 1982. Voprosy zaimstvovaniya i uporyadocheniya inozychnykh terminov i terminoelementov [Borrowing and classification of foreign terms and term elements]. Moscow: Nauka. 149 pp. [In Russian]
- [MER RF] Official Site of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia: Министерство экономического развития Российской Федерации (economy.gov.ru) (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- [MID RF] Official Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia: Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации (mid.ru) (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- [President RF] Official Site of the Presidential Administration of Russia: Президент России (kremlin.ru) (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- Taube A.M., Litvinova A.V., Miller A.D., Daglish R.C. 1982. Russian-English Dictionary. Sixth Stereotype Edition. Moscow: Russian Language. 832 pp.
- Taube A.M., Daglish R.C. 2005. Contemporary Russian-English Dictionary. Fifth Stereotype Edition. Moscow: Russian Language. 773 pp.
- UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/> (accessed on: 23.12.2021).
- World Factbook: The World Factbook (cia.gov) (accessed on: 23.12.2021).