

## To the translation of names of Russian administrative divisions into English

### К переводу названий российских административно-территориальных единиц на английский

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**KEY WORDS:** translation, names of first and second tier Russian administrative divisions, loanwords, transliteration, transcription, calques, analogues.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** перевод, названия российских административно-территориальных единиц первого и второго порядка, заимствование, транслитерация, транскрипция, калькирование, аналоги.

**ABSTRACT.** The article reviews versions of translation of the basic names of administrative divisions of the Russian Federation into English, including those of Russian governmental agencies, on the one hand, and American and English official and expert sources, on the other. Methods used to translate first and second tier administrative divisions are briefly analysed. 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 in the English language proper.

**РЕЗЮМЕ.** В статье рассматриваются варианты перевода основных названий единиц административно-территориального деления Российской Федерации на английский язык, включая варианты российских структур государственного управления, а также американских и английских источников. Приводится краткий анализ способов, используемых при переводе названий административно-территориальных единиц первого и второго порядка. Предлагается унифицировать этот подход, взяв за основу широко распространённую в мире практику заимствования таких названий, а также уже сложившийся комплекс соответствующих терминов в собственно английском языке.

#### Introduction

While preparing an analytical or scientific article related to the Russian territory it is almost always necessary to operate with categories of administrative divi-

sion of the Russian Federation, such as ‘on the territory of Kaliningrad Oblast’, ‘in Primorsky Krai’, ‘Moscow and Moscow Oblast’, etc. These categories are very concrete in the Russian language. Versions suggested by the various Russian sources, however, including the English versions of sites of federal bodies and agencies, more often than not do not allow univocal identification of what exactly is meant.

Although the system of administrative division of Russia in its modern form appeared not so long ago, in the nineties of the last century, the names of its major units, such as *область*, *край*, *округ*, have existed for centuries, along with the sunk into oblivion *губерния*, *уезд* or *волость* [GSE; GRE]. Despite the century-long history of these terms, the situation with translation of some of them into the most widespread currently English (of course, the language of Russian sources is meant) is still rather unsatisfactory. An attempt to define adequate equivalents for the terms *область*, *край* and *округ* was made recently [Kazantsev, 2022]. The present paper is a further contribution to the translation of names of Russian administrative divisions into English, with expanded illustrative material, and additional terms analysed.

#### To the translation of names of Russian administrative divisions into English

The Russian Federation is divided into *республики* (‘respubliki’), *области* (‘oblasti’), *автономных округа* (‘avtonomnye okruga’), *края* (‘kraja’), *города феде-*

рального подчинения ('goroda federal'nogo podchineniya') and (one) автономная область ('avtonomnaya oblast') [GRE]. These first tier administrative divisions, in their turn, are divided into second tier divisions, районы ('rayony'). Cities are divided into the same районы, and also into округа ('okrug') and поселения ('poseleniya'): for example, Moscow consists of 12 административных округов ('administrativnykh okrugov'), which include 125 административных районов ('administrativnykh rayonov') and 21 поселение ('poselenie') [GRE].

While there is little problem with translation of terms республика, автономный and административный, which are borrowings from western Indo-European languages (Lat. *respublica*, Gr. *αυτονομία*, Lat. *administratio*) [DRL] — it is just the reverse calques 'republic', 'autonomous' and 'administrative' — translation of some other names may cause certain difficulties. Especially of область, край, округ and район. Curiously, this list of mostly original Russian words (область, край, округ) also has район, which is a borrowing from French (from *rayon* — 'beam', 'radius') [DRL].

If we refer to the official sites of Russian federal agencies, to be exact, to the their English language versions, we will discover the following. The site of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation uses two translation versions for область ('oblast' and 'region'), two versions for край ('krai' and 'territory'), two versions for округ ('okrug' and 'district'), but just one version for район ('district'), both rural and urban (intracity) [MER RF]. These variants are not used for explanation of the terms, but independently: in one article we come across Moscow Region, in another — Moscow Oblast; in the first we can see 'Krasnodar Krai', in the second — 'Krasnodar Territory'. At the same time authors use the term 'region' to define non-administrative territories, for example, the area that includes the city of Moscow and Moscow Oblast — leaving the reader to decide what the difference between these terms are. Some examples, chronologically: 'In the end, all this is aimed at making the lives of people in the Arkhangelsk **region** and the Nenets Autonomous **district** better', 27 May 2020 11:38; 'Significant attention has been also devoted to priority development of Beslan, Mozdoksky and Prigorodny **Districts**', 10 June 2020 13:08; 'Among the leading **regions** starting in 2020 in terms of self-employment are St Petersburg, the Sverdlovsk **Oblast**, the Samara **Oblast**, the Rostov **Oblast** and the Krasnodar **Krai**', 24 December 2020 19:05; 'The most active **regions** in this sector were Khanty-Mansi Autonomous **Okrug**, North Ossetia — Alania and Magadan **Oblast**', 24 December 2020 19:05; 'Projects in question are geographically diverse: Moscow, Volgograd, Sverdlovsk, ... Kemerovo **Regions**, Perm **Territory**, Primorye **Territory**, Krasnodar **Territory**, the Republic of Karelia and the Republic of Tatarstan', 25 December 2020 12:25 [MER RF].

Materials on the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russia use the same versions, 'oblast' and

'region' for область, 'okrug' and 'district' for округ, one version ('district') for район, both rural and urban — but to translate the term край three versions are used, to 'krai' and 'territory', a third, 'region', is added, which also is used for 'область' [MID RF]. The site of the Government of the Russian Federation in its English version is more consistent and uses just one version for each term: 'region' for область, 'territory' for край, 'district' for округ and the same 'district' for both rural and urban район [GOV RF]. Finally, the Official Site of the Presidential Administration of Russia, using two versions for область ('oblast' and 'region') and край ('krai' and 'territory'), does not go beyond just one version for terms округ and район ('district' in both cases) [President RF].

Russian-English dictionaries published in the USSR or Russia mostly reflect the actual situation in the Russian practice of translation of these terms into English, suggesting two versions for each of область (*oblast* and *region*), край (*krai* and *territory*) and округ (*okrug* and *district*) as administrative divisions. Unlike the above-mentioned sites, however, these dictionaries suggest also two versions for район as well ('raion' and 'district') [Taube et al., 1982; Taube, Daglish, 2005].

So, is it correct that different English equivalents are attributed to the same administrative unit, often in materials from the same site or articles in the same scientific journal?

To answer this question let us look at the problem from the point of view of the theory of translation, then how names of foreign administrative units are translated in Russian and English in general, and how names of the Russian administrative divisions are actually translated in English sources, in particular.

According to the theory of translation, there is a rather limited number of ways to translate concepts and realities of foreign cultures that are absent in the recipient culture and language (and names of foreign administrative units belong in this very category). It is borrowing, or loanwords, with transliteration, sometimes transcription, if alphabets are different, when the word is directly transferred into the recipient language; calques, i.e., literal word-for-word or root-for-root translation of the foreign word; 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, finally, descriptive method [Lotte, 1982; Fedorov, 2002].

Let us look at how names of foreign administrative units are translated into Russian and English. In Russian, for example, the main administrative divisions of the USA are called штаты, of Canada — провинции, of France — регионы, of Germany — (федеральные) земли, of Poland — воеводства, of Mongolia — аймаки [GSE; GRE]. Of these штат, провинция, регион and воеводство are loanwords/borrowings with transliteration (from English 'state' and 'province', French *région* and Polish *województwo*), and аймак is a borrowing with transcription (from Mongolian *аймаг*),

while (*федеральная*) *земля* is a calque from German *Bundesland*. On the other hand, major Finnish administrative units are called in Russian *области* (in Finnish — *maakunta*), and Chinese and Vietnamese — *провинции* (in Chinese — *sheng*, in Vietnamese — *tin*) [GSE; GRE; Cowie, Evison, 1986; Encyclopaedia Britannica; World Factbook]. Here we come across the analogue *область*, while the same administrative unit is *maakunta* in Finnish, as well as indirect borrowing of an analogue (Chinese and Vietnamese *провинции*) occurred through an intermediary language (English or French). It should be noted that the use of analogues is characteristic of countries that had been colonies (Vietnam) or integral parts (Finland) of empires, or their dependent territories (China).

Let us compare it with how names of the same foreign administrative divisions are translated into the English language (for this purpose only governmental sites and established encyclopaedias and dictionaries were used). In English, the following lexemes are used for the major administrative divisions: of France — ‘region’, of Germany — ‘state/Land’, of Poland — ‘województwo/voivod(e)ship’, of Mongolia — ‘aimak/aymag/aimag’, of Finland — ‘province/region’, of China — ‘province’, of Vietnam — ‘province’ (Cambridge Dictionary; Oxford Dictionary; Encyclopaedia Britannica; Merriam-Webster; World Factbook). Here, as in Russian, the most common are loanwords (‘region’, ‘Land’, ‘województwo’, ‘aimak/aymag/aimag’), there is a case of combination of a loanword and a calque (‘voivod(e)ship’); analogues (‘state’, ‘province’) are also represented. The lexeme ‘province’ is an analogue of the Chinese *sheng*, Vietnamese *tin* and Finnish *maakunta*. The term ‘state’, which is used along with the borrowing ‘Land’ for the German *Bundesland*, has a meaning ‘a territorial unit in which the general body of law is distinct from any other territorial unit’ (Merriam-Webster) and thus is an exact analogue.

To sum it up, first tier foreign administrative units are introduced into both Russian and English mostly as borrowings and calques. Analogous names are also come across, but they usually represent administrative units of countries that used to be colonies or dependent in one way or another not so long ago. It should be noted that none of the examples may be referred to hyponymy, except one of the English versions of Finnish *maakunta* [World Factbook]: the lexeme ‘region’, having a wide semantic range, does not have a single meaning that can be associated with administrative division [Cambridge Dictionary; Oxford Dictionary; Merriam-Webster], and should, therefore, be considered a hypernym to the hyponym *maakunta*. The descriptive method, due to obvious reasons, is not used for translation of names of foreign administrative divisions.

Now, let us look at how names of second tier administrative units (equivalent to *район*) are translated into the same two languages, Russian and English. In the Russian language American states and English historic countries are divided into *графства* (from ‘counties’), but American and English cities — into *районы/округа*

(‘districts/boroughs’); French regions — into *департаменты* (from *départements*), but French cities — again, into *районы/округа* (‘arrondissements’); Polish ‘województwa’ — into *повяты* (from ‘powiaty’), but Polish cities — into, again, *районы* (‘dzielnice’) (GSE; GRE). We can see that in all given examples names of rural (non-intracity) divisions are translated into Russian by loanwords (*департаменты*, *повяты*) or calques (*графство* is a calque from the English ‘county’), while names of urban (intracity) ones — by analogues (*районы/округа*).

In the English language the situation is similar: French ‘regions’ are divided into ‘departments’, but French cities — into ‘arrondissements’; German ‘states/Lands’ — into ‘(rural) districts’ (*Landkreise*), but German cities — into ‘(city) districts’ (*Stadtkreise*); Polish ‘województwa’ — into ‘powiats’, but Polish cities — into ‘districts’ [Encyclopaedia Britannica; Wikimedia; Wikipedia] — in most cases names of rural second tier divisions are translated by either calques (‘rural districts’ for *Landkreise*), or by loanwords (‘departments’, ‘powiats’), whereas urban (intracity) ones — by analogues (‘districts’). However, in English we see the use of borrowing/calques to translate names of urban divisions as well: the German *Stadtkreise* is translated by a calque (‘city district’), while the French *arrondissement* — by a borrowing (‘arrondissement’).

There are two apparent groups, both in Russian and in English, in terms of translation of names of foreign second tier divisions (equivalent to Russian *район*): names of rural/non-intracity divisions translated exclusively by borrowings or (rarely) calques, and urban/intracity divisions translated almost exclusively by analogues or (rarely) by borrowings/calques. By the translation method, the first group is close to the first tier administrative divisions, in which borrowings/calques is the prevailing means; the second group, in which analogues are dominating, is strikingly different from both.

And now let us look at how the terms for Russian administrative divisions actually sound in the English language. The *Factbook* of the US Government gives the following structure of the administrative division in the Russian Federation: ‘46 provinces (oblasti, singular — oblast), 21 republics (respubliki, singular — respublika), 4 autonomous okrugs (avtonomnyye okrugi, singular — avtonomnyy okrug), 9 krays (kraya, singular — kray), 2 federal cities (goroda, singular gorod), and 1 autonomous oblast (avtonomnaya oblast)’ [World Factbook]. The famous American Merriam-Webster Dictionary has entries ‘oblast’ (‘a political subdivision of Imperial Russia or a republic of the U.S.S.R. or of Russia’) and ‘raion’ (‘a political subdivision in the U.S.S.R. comparable to the U.S. county’) [Merriam-Webster]. Notably, the term ‘raion’ is given only as an equivalent to ‘county’, i.e., applicable, from the point of view of the Dictionary, only for rural divisions.

Encyclopaedia Britannica lists the following first tier administrative divisions in modern Russia: ‘oblasts, republics, autonomous okrugs, krays, federal cities, and

one autonomous oblast'. Rural/non-intracity divisions are referred to as 'rayons' [Encyclopaedia Britannica]. The Oxford English Dictionary has entries 'oblast' ('a second-order administrative subdivision in Russia'), 'krai' ('a second-order administrative division, a region, a territory'), 'okrug' ('in Russia and Bulgaria, a territorial division for administrative and other purposes') and 'rayon/raion' ('in Russia, a small territorial division for administrative purposes') [Oxford Dictionary]. The British Government site also uses just one version for each of *область* and *край* ('oblast' and 'krai'), and uses the term 'rayon' to denote a rural subdivision in Russia and post-Soviet territories (*Increased risk of tuberculosis among health care workers in Samara Oblast, Russia: analysis of notification data*; *In addition and for security reasons, the FCDO advises against all travel to: within 10km of the border with the Ukrainian Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts, ... and Stavropol Krai*; *The centrepiece of the Ambassador's 11 September visit to Osh was the opening of a Community Based Kindergarten (CBK) in Jim village, Kara-Suu rayon, Osh oblast*) [UK Government]. International internet sites on their pages devoted to the administrative division of the Russian Federation use names 'oblast', 'krai', 'autonomous okrug', 'raion' (for rural divisions) and 'district' (for intracity divisions) [e.g., Wikipedia; Wikimedia].

Thus, we can conclude that American and British linguists and governmental agencies, on the one hand, and native speakers of the English language who use it in their professional activity, on the other, rather uniformly approach the 'problem' of choosing the right equivalent for such names of Russian administrative divisions, as *область, край, (автономный) округ* and (*сельский/внегородской) район*. They actually do not seem to see any problem here. They always use loanwords: 'oblast', 'krai/kray', 'autonomous okrug', 'raion/rayon'. At the same time, in all studied Anglo-American resources the name of the urban/intracity division was translated as 'district', with the exception of the Oxford English Dictionary, which suggests using the term 'rayon/raion' for both types of the division [Oxford Dictionary].

Summarising the above mentioned, we can make the following conclusions.

The term *область* as a unit of the administrative division of Russia has just one appropriate equivalent in English, and it is the loanword 'oblast'. The widely used (in Russian sources) term 'region' is inappropriate, being a too broadly defined hypernym; it is not used in the English language as a name for administrative divisions, except when the donor language itself has it as a name for an administrative division (as is the case with the French *région*). The term 'province', as it was mentioned in the previous paper [Kazantsev, 2022], could be quite a possible version for *область*, being a very close analogue, but it is characteristic mostly of former or current colonies, or dependent territories ('an administrative division, especially in the periphery of the empire' [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]). Besides,

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].

The term *край* also turns out to have just one adequate equivalent, and it is the loanword 'krai', or 'kray', depending on the applied transliteration rules. A possible version could be the rather exact analogue 'territory', but the English language definitely prefers the borrowing 'krai/kray' for a foreign administrative division.

For the term *округ* there seems to be actually one option as well: it is '(autonomous) okrug'. The English and American sources that refer to this type of a federal region, use it in this way, leaving 'district' for the city, military and federal districts [Kazantsev, 2022].

As for the term *район* as a second tier unit of the administrative division of the Russian Federation, its concept should be divided into two categories: rural/non-intracity administrative divisions and urban/intracity administrative divisions — for each of these the recipient language has its own adequate equivalent. For the rural/non-intracity administrative division the English language has the borrowing 'raion/rayon', depending on the transliteration rules, whereas for the urban/intracity administrative division it is the analogue 'district'. The use of one term, 'district', for both categories should be avoided. Nevertheless, it is possible to use one term, e.g., 'district', for both types, provided it is preceded with adjectives, e.g., 'rural district' and 'city district', distinguishing the two.

Finally, the preferred variants of translation of names of Russian administrative divisions into the English language are given in a table:

область	oblast
край	krai / kray
республика	republic
автономный округ	autonomous okrug
район (as a unit within oblast, krai, etc.)	raion / rayon / rural district
район (as a unit within a large city)	district / city district

**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.

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