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**The Conveying of Semantic Content While Translating  
Proper Names from Russian into Chinese  
(by the example of the M. Bulgakov's novel  
«The Master and Margarita»)**

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*Currently, proper names are translated using both phonetic and semantic translation methods more and more frequently. The reason for this is that a lot of the readership has already begun to accept foreign literature either expressly or by implication. Therefore, we supposed that the phonetic language translation method can no longer answer the current readership's requirements when translating proper names. Due to the culturological function and the readers' perception, the tendency to use both phonetic and semantic methods of translation of names has obviously appeared in Chinese translation theory. We might conclude, in the process of translating, in our view, we must use the complex method which includes both phonetic and semantic methods.*

*Keywords: semantics, proper names, translation, translation technics, the Chinese language, Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita.*

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**Point of view**

«There are no bad words which would be given to a man as a name. Happy people have inherited the surname of the Baranov (sheep). Citizens with the names Baranovich and Baranowski also have no encumbrances. Baranski feels much worse.» These words are quoted from the fantastic story «A Bright Person» (Ilf and Petrov, 1961, p.1). J. W. von Goethe, the famous German poet and philosopher, discusses the significance of naming a person: «It is names of people, not raincoats, hanging on their shoulders, which can be smooth and straight, but tightly like leather, tight-fitting

dress; it cannot be scraped and cut, not very human hurt (Goethe, Johann, 1976, p. 25)

Taking into account the fact that there is worldwide economical and political globalization, translation and interpreting is gaining ever more currency today as a direct method of exchanging different types of cultures and as a method of international communication. The translation of names is one of the most significant issues in the process of international communication. This article covers the difficult issue that all translators or interpreters have to encounter – translation of names (including first names, surnames and patronymic) from Russian

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into Chinese. So how exactly we must translate names? And which method must we choose – phonetic or semantic? We suppose that in order to maintain the sound of a word, it is sometimes translated with the help of the phonetic method, taking into account that a name is being translated into a foreign language. Apart from its sound, we can use a name's meaning to translate it. We are seeking to explain several significant points of translating Russian names by making some examples. These points are: translating first names, surnames and patronymics at the level of phonetics, characteristics of Russian personal names and a display of two sexes in translation and translation of proper names from Russian into Chinese in general. In addition, we will analyze different translators' versions of the family and first names translation in the novel «The Master and Margarita», M. Bulgakov. In the end of the article there is a list of the most frequent Russian names translated into Chinese.

Currently, proper names are translated using both phonetic and semantic translation methods more and more frequently. The reason for this is that a lot of the readership has already begun to accept foreign literature either expressly or by implication. Therefore, we supposed that the phonetic language translation method can no longer answer the current readership's requirements when translating proper names. Due to the culturological function and the readers' perception, the tendency to use both phonetic and semantic methods of translation of names has obviously appeared in Chinese translation theory. We might conclude, in the process of translating, in our view, we must use the complex method which includes both phonetic and semantic methods.

In order to develop our point of view about the new method of translating proper names into Chinese, firstly, we will explore the issue about translating names to our times.

In linguistics, proper names are defined as **denominating lexical terms**. These terms indicate differences between similar objects. Place names and names of some individuals are generally formed from common nouns. The underlying form of proper names is not usually analyzed and does not carry an important evaluating message. In other words, a name is a name. Considering the premises, translation of proper names can sometimes be misrepresented which leads to the possibility of confusion with toponymy. Place and individual names are translated **traditionally** or using **transcription**, if there is no play on an underlying form of a word. The graphic examples of traditional equivalents are: biblical names, diminutive names, names that are translated using transcription. **Historical names** and fiction characters various **nicknames** are translated maintaining the semantics of a root morpheme. For instance, the historical nicknames of French and English kings. Zoonyms (or pet names) are usually translated or transcribed, depending on an underlying form of a name. There are several unpublished rules about translation of **place names**. Specifically, we use traditional method to translate lakes' and seas' names, the largest part of the rest place names is transcribed. Also squares', streets' and parks' names are transcribed; however, there are exceptions to the rule.

All proper names have the meaning of «objectness», i.e. one part of the meaning is the generalization about a certain object (or matter that we conceive as an object).

The largest number of proper names makes certain object class in which one of objects especially stands out. It would be strange to talk about «anthroponyms», «toponyms» or any other groups of proper names, if they were not connected with such conceptions as «a person» and «territorial object» etc., or if this very connection depended on context and personal wishes of a speaker.

Proper names contain some information about an object and its characteristics. And this information can be rich or poor and more or less well-known in different spheres of communications. If this information becomes widespread on a language community scale that means that the information about this particular object is a part of a language meaning of a **proper name**.

The problem concerning a meaning of a proper name arouses not only theoretical interest. It is becoming extremely important in intercultural and interlanguage communication. It would seem that proper names can easily get over interlanguage barriers, because being used outside the sphere of their 'native' language, proper names tend to keep their external form. But for some significant elements of their content it becomes more difficult to get over such barriers. Without keeping their meaning proper names can not fully function in diverse language environment. It causes some problems of misunderstanding and inaccurate perception of texts which contain proper names.

Ex facte, it can seem that translation of proper names presents no difficulty. Even the term 'translation' can relatively be applied to proper names, because in most cases methods such as transcription and transliteration are used to convey them in another language. In modern linguistics proper names often are defined as 'denominating lexical units', whereas **common names** are considered to be 'denoting units'. In other words the foremost function of proper names is denomination, which means to denominate for a purpose of distinguishing objects of the same type. The foremost function of common names is to nominate, which means to indicate the meaning, to connote.

The distinctive feature of proper names in contrast to **adopted foreign words** is that, in most cases, after translation proper names keep

their original sound pattern. This is due to the specific semantic structure of proper names. The sound shell acquires the primary importance in translation. It happens because proper names directly mean some individual objects; they escape the stage of conception or general notion (referent).

Besides typical proper names (such as Vasiliy, Marusya, Moscow, America etc.) there are also some names which are to some extent have motivation or meaning (such as Russian Federation, Mining Institute, also the names of books and films such as 'Viy', 'Three poplars at Plushika' etc.), and this fact can add some complication to any possible theory of a proper name.

### Example

There are several ways to translate proper names:

- Transliteration
- Transcription
- Transposition
- Tracing

Although the methods mentioned above already exist, the methods of translating proper names from Russian to Chinese still are not fully explored. For many centuries last names as a family hereditary name exist in Russian culture. It should be noted that Russian surnames are numerous and very peculiar: the number of them is more than 8300 (Ganzhina,2001,p.3). The origin of some Russian surnames heretofore stays obscure. In an attempt to divide them into groups we can say that there are some last names with a direct meaning. For example: last names which refer to fruits (Vinogradov which can be associated with grape, Vishnyakov which can be associated with cherry), last names which refer to vegetables (Kapustina which can be associated with cabbage), last names which refer to different kinds of animals (Sokol can be associated with

falcon, Medvedev can be associated with bear, Kozlov can be associated with goat, Golub can be associated with pigeon etc.), last names which refer to some objects (Pushkin can be associated with cannon) and a lot of other last names which have some meaning, such as Bezrukov (can be associated with a person with no hands), Moroz (can be associated with freezing weather) etc. Another group consists of last names which don't contain any meaning, they act as a mark of distinction for different people in a society, nowadays there are more than 3000 old and recent Russian names exist. Accordingly, a large number of patronymics has accumulated in Russian culture. In order to translate all the first names, last names and patronymics appropriately as proper names, there is no need in taking their meaning or their grammatical features into account. There is a special method in translation theory to translate the names which is phonetic method. Phonetic method was popular in China when translators for the first time faced the problem of foreign names translation. Translators missed direct and culturological meanings and translated them only according to the phonetic pattern of the word, because only phonetic-based translation could keep the sounding of any proper name and distinguish the person in the process of communication. Concerning the problem of translating foreign proper names for many years, translators and linguists believed that names were something beyond a language, they didn't have any meaning and they were untranslatable. It follows from this that phonetic method is the best and the simplest for translating names. In common situations phonetic method is the most popular, especially in cases of address and live speech. In translating of foreign names so-called 'direct phonetic method' is used, although sometimes the name contains the word with a simple meaning, for example the name Bill Gates (比尔·盖茨), George Bush (乔治·布什) etc., they

never can be translated as 比尔·大门 and 乔治·灌木.

The main point of the phonetic method is that such kinds of translation, with the help of language material of foreign language, can keep the pronunciation of the original. The phonetic method is usually used in translation of personal names and names of places. For example:

1. Mikhail – 米哈伊尔 (mi ha yi er)
2. «Anna Karenina» – «安娜·卡列尼娜» (an na·ka lie ni na)
3. Aleksandr Tvardovsky – 亚历山大·特瓦尔多夫斯基 (ya li shan da·te wa er duo fu si ji)
4. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Fadeev – 亚历山大·历山大洛维奇·法捷耶夫 (ya li shan da·li shan da luo wei qi·fa jie ye fu)
5. Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov – 伊万·伊万诺维奇·伊万诺夫 (yi wan·yi wan nuo wei qi·yi wan nuo fu)
6. Nina Ivanovna Ivanova – 尼娜·伊万诺夫娜·伊万诺娃 (ni na·yi wan nuo fu na·yi wan nuo wa)
7. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin – 弗拉基米尔·弗拉基米洛维奇·普京 (fu la ji mi er·fu la ji mi luo wei qi·pu jing)

In examples 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 the words «Mikhail», «Ivan», «Nina», «Vladimir», «Ivanov» were translated according to the phonetic method, the sounding of each word is represented in the translation. But in the examples 3 and 4 the pronunciation of the word «Aleksandr» is misrepresented.

The given name has already been translated from English into Chinese as «亚历山大», and this version has been using in the history of translation of foreign literature into Chinese for many years. Traditionally it is better to use the version that has already been accepted by translators and that is well-known by people. As we know, Russian family names and personal names have some meanings, however, if we use

the phonetic method in translation the meanings of Russian family names and personal names will be lost. The reason is that, from one point of view, the translation of names is phonetics' bearer of given name in foreign language. It may be said that in translation the names are the same, they just sound like syllables of other language.

As one of the richest languages of the world, Chinese has special features which with the help of characters not only keep phonetics of surnames and personal names but also give additional information about person: a sex, a character etc. There are many homonyms in the Chinese language, that is why when we choose characters for phonetics we should pay attention to the meanings of different characters. As stated above, the translation of surnames and personal names in Chinese can give additional information about a person. For instance,

«Anna Karenina»

«安娜·卡列尼娜»

(an na . ka lie ni na)

In this translation the character娜 (na), used twice, for phonetic similarity we can find a lot of characters which have the same pronunciation – 那, 拿, 纳, 娜, 哪, 钠, 呐, 捺, 衲, 纳 and others. But the fourth character is the most suitable for us because it contains the grapheme with the meaning 'woman'. And it is very significant because it symbolizes the name of a woman and pointed feminine gender.

Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov

伊万·伊万诺维奇·伊万诺夫,

(yi wan yi wan nuo wei qi yi wan nuo fu)

In translation of the surname **Ivanov** we used the word诺夫(nuo fu), the character 诺 has the meaning of «promise» and 夫means «man». These characters are suitable for the name of man. But sometimes translators and students do not pay attention to the word's meaning and use instead of 儒夫, which translates as «greenhorn». Such endings of Russian family names, personal

names, patronymics and their translations in Chinese can be look like this:

-kaya-卡娅,

-nova-诺娃,

-novich-诺维奇,

-rov-罗夫etc.

In other words, the translation of surnames and personal names from one language into another has no sense. But there are cases when translated names have inadequate meanings in the target language. It is worth paying attention not only to phonetics but also to orthography, because a good name is a visiting card of person and its bad translation can ruin a person's destiny.

As we know, Russian definitive name consists of three parts: family name, personal name and patronymic. Usually they are translated one after another: 普京·弗拉基米儿·弗拉基米洛维奇-Putin Vladimir Vladimirovich and vice versa 弗拉基米儿·弗拉基米洛维奇·普京 Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. We would like to emphasize that when we translate surname, personal name and patronymic together it is acceptable to put sign «.» to separate the words. Usually, in newspapers and scientific articles it is contracted as 普京·弗·弗 and even the part of the name can be left in russian: 普京.B.B.. We also want to direct your attention to the fact that when there is only a surname in a text we should add the word 先生 (Mr) or 女士 (Mrs).

In this part of the article we will analyze different versions of translations of Chinese surnames and first names from the novel «The Master and Margarita» (Bulgakov, 1989), written by Mikhail Bulgakov. As a reference we will take two versions of translation of this novel in Chinese. The first of them was made by the translator Qian Cheng in 1987, it was the earliest translation of «The Master and Margarita». The second was made by Gao Huiqun in 2007 (*The Master and Margarita* / translated by Gao Huiqun, 2007), it was the latest translation of this

Table. Comparative analysis of translation of surnames and personal names from the novel «The Master and Margarita» in the Chinese language

| Surname, given name, patronymic from the novel. | Translation of Qian Cheng | Translation of Gao Huiqun | Phonetic similarity of translations | Semantic meaning of translations | More appropriate translation |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz                   | 柏辽兹·米哈伊尔·亚历山大罗维奇          | 米哈伊尔·亚历山大·罗维奇·别尔利奥兹       | B better than A                     |                                  | B                            |
| Margarita                                       | 玛格丽特                      | 玛加丽塔                      | B better than A                     |                                  | A                            |
| Jesus   | 耶稣                        | 耶稣                        | A is equal to B                     |                                  | A and B                      |
| Pontius Pilate                                  | 本丢·彼拉多                    | 本丢·彼拉多                    | A and B                             |                                  | A and B                      |
| Voland  | 沃兰德                       | 沃兰德                       | A and B                             |                                  | A and B                      |
| Stephan Likhodeyev                              | 斯乔帕·利霍捷耶夫                 | 斯乔帕·利霍杰耶夫                 | A and B                             |                                  | A and B                      |
| Master  | 大师                        | 大师                        |                                     | A and B                          | A and B                      |
| Behemoth  | 河马                        | 黑猫                        |                                     | A and B                          | A                            |
| Bezdomniy                                       | 无家汉                       | 流浪汉                       |                                     | B                                | B                            |

novel. We will analyze names from this novel in Russian and Chinese. Our aim is to compare different versions of translation of these names in Chinese and to verify appropriateness of the translation of this novel. Hereinafter is a table with surnames and first names in Russian and Chinese. We will analyze these names and will try to check the techniques of translation of Russian surnames and first names in Chinese which were mentioned in the first part of our work (Table).

After analyzing we can easily see that although these versions were made in different times (there were twenty years between them), there are some names which were translated equally. For instance, Jesus and Pontius Pilate. The both of these names are related to religion and they have been translated into many different languages, they were accorded wide recognition and it is better not to change their translations. When translating regular names (not religious ones) into Chinese we follow principles of the phonetic method, by which we mean that the main purpose of translation is to keep pronunciation of a word, e.g. in all translations of the names **Mikhail**

**Aleksandrovich Berlioz, Margarita and Stephan Likhodeyev** into Chinese the original pronunciation was kept. Yet we should mention the fact that different translators chose different characters for the same sounds and as the result those characters imitated the pronunciation of the official name differently, e.g. the translation of **Berlioz** as 别尔利奥兹 sounds more similar to the original than 柏辽兹. We eventually found out that in case of syllable translation of names and Surnames, it is better to translate all syllables separately and it is also preferable to translate all of the syllables, which makes translation more equivalent.

However, due to the development of grammar tenses and alterations in a language, together with the intensification of cross cultural communication, the translation of names gradually changes from phonetic to semantic translation. This phenomenon is particularly represented in the literary translation. Thorough analysis of the modern literature translations shows that nowadays a lot of names are quite frequently translated phonetically and semantically at the same time. A person's name as a part of human life and speech contains social character and ethnic

flavor. Many proper names are derived from the history and culture of mankind. Different names represent the shadows of the culture, language, psychology, religion, tradition, morals etc. The name Alexander, for instance, originated from ancient Greece and was the name of Alexander the Great. The name David came from the Bible. David was a ruler of Jewish state. Names such as Helen (海伦), Angle (安琪儿), Pando (潘多拉) represent the wealth of European culture. Even the most common names which appear in literature somehow represent the culturological idea of the author.

Therefore when translating proper names we should rely not only on phonetic translation but more on semantic translation. It considers the names from the literary texts first of all. Otherwise a great amount of culturological information from the text will be lost which in turn may result in the absence of cultural and national peculiarities of the original text. This leads to the readers of the translation being unable to grasp the original idea. It can have adverse effects on the perception of literature in general.

The semantic method in the history of proper names translation appeared long time ago. The first translations were done in the times of Xia dynasty when Indian canons were being translated.

We know that a literary text always provides different characters in order to reflect the reality of social life and that «a person» is always the main object of the literary work. When we read or examine characters of literature, the names of these characters play a significant role. The writer chooses a name for a character extremely carefully as he/she wants to indicate the character's temper or to anticipate his/her life.

Besides, some names from the novel were translated not phonetically but semantically: **Homeless** – 无家汉, 流浪汉, **Behemoth** – 河马, 黑猫, **The Master** – 大师.

## Result

Even though the modern theory of translation has a lot of valuable scientific studies in the field of proper names translation, the translation of Russian proper names and surnames into Chinese is not developed enough. In this work with the help of several Russian family names, first names and proper names from the novel «The Master and Margarita», the author explained how to translate Russian proper names into Chinese properly. Except for the phonetic method (the method of finding equivalents according to sounding of a name), it is preferably to translate all syllables of a name in order to have the most equivalent translation. When translating proper names the meaning of a character should be also taken to a serious consideration as Chinese has a lot of homonyms which differ greatly in their meaning.

Some radicals in characters indicate human's sex or temper and for this reason we should choose characters which suit a person's name best of all or at least are not misleading or insulting. From the analysis of different versions of translations of the names from «The Master and Margarita» into Chinese we concluded that common family and first names in literary texts are better to translate phonetically whereas nicknames and pseudonyms should be translated semantically in order to keep an idea of the source text and maintain its style. Nowadays a lot of translations are done phonetically and semantically at the same time. The development and intensification of cultural exchange between the East and the West favored the opportunity of people being able to contact – directly or indirectly – foreign literature. Therefore we believe that the phonetic method is not efficient enough to satisfy modern readers. Relying on the culturological function and the perception of readers the Chinese theory of translation tends to use both the phonetic and the semantic method of translation of proper

names. We consider that during the process of method of translation, which consists of both the translation it is preferable to use the complex phonetic and semantic methods.

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## Семантическая передача при переводе русских имен собственных на китайский язык

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*На сегодняшний день все больше и больше имена собственные переводятся фонетическим и смысловым способом вместе. Причина в том, что с развитием и углублением культурного обмена между востоком и западом многие читатели уже начинают косвенно или прямым образом принимать иностранную литературу. Таким образом, мы считаем, что единый способ перевода имен собственных, т.е. фонетический перевод, при переводе уже не может удовлетворить современных читателей. Ориентируясь на культурологическую функцию и восприятие читателей, в китайской теории перевода уже явно появилась тенденция перевода фамилий и имен с помощью двух способов – фонетического и смыслового. Можно сказать, что в процессе перевода фамилий и имен, с нашей точки зрения, нужно пользоваться комплексным способом, который включает фонетический и смысловой.*

*Ключевые слова: русский язык, китайский язык, перевод, антропоним, имена собственные, фонетика, семантика, Булгаков, «Мастер и Маргарита», Воланд.*

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