Translation of the Sakha (Yakut) Culture-Specific Vocabulary into English

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The article discusses the issues of translation of the Sakha culture-specific vocabulary into English on the phonological level. Along with the description of both the Sakha and the English phonological systems, it studies the most difficult aspects of the Sakha-English translation of culture-specific vocabulary and proposes their solution with regard for phonological differences of the source and the target languages. The examples for the analysis are taken from the Sakha epic olonkho "Nurgun Botur the Swift" written down by Platon Oiunskii.

Keywords: culture-specific vocabulary, translation, Sakha (Iakut), English, phoneme, diphthong, monophthong, phonological norms.

Introduction

At the present time the circle of people, who study the epic heritage of the Sakha people, *olonkho*, is expanding. The heroic epic *olonkho,* which presents the base for the Sakha (previously known as Yakut) national self-consciousness, has always been an object of researches in various fields of science – folklore and culture studies, ethnography, history. Thus the questions of *olonkho* genre, its images and ideas, plots and genetic and typological links with the epics of related Turkic and Mongolian peoples, as well as its role in the formation of the Sakha literature are well explored to-date. What has not been well discussed about *olonkho* so far are the peculiarities of *olonkho* language and especially the issues of its translation into unrelated languages (Illarionova 2008: 14-15).

The aim of this article is to study the phonetic and phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic vocabulary into English in the epic "Nurgun Botur the Swift" written by Platon Oiunskii. The analysis will partly include the Russian translation, which, in our mind, also requires a contemporary approach.

Theoretical Framework

Culture-specific vocabulary (further CSV) are lexical units (words and set expressions) of one of the languages in the process of

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translation which do not have either full, or part equivalents among lexical units of the other language (Barkhudarov 2008: 94). CSV is a broad term which includes various personal names, ethnonyms, toponyms, culture words, which altogether comprise a key element in understanding of a work of art to which an epic surely belongs.

The CSV of an epic can contain important information on the history, culture and linguistic contacts of a nation. Besides bearing a broad extralinguistic knowledge, a CSV is an integral part of a structure of an epic text, its formal aspect. Therefore an epic CSV can be studied on all linguistic levels – phonetic and phonological, morphological, and syntactic.

Before starting the analysis of the CSV translation in the epic proposed, it is necessary to give a brief description of the Sakha and English languages, compare their norms in phonetics and phonology, and find out main differences underlying in them.

The considered languages – Sakha and English – belong to different language families and groups, which is the reason for sufficient differences in their phonological, lexical and syntactic systems.

The Sakha language is an agglutinative language. Being one the most ancient representatives of the Turkic family of languages, it is distinguished by a number of unknown archaic forms on all levels of its system.

A contemporary Sakha alphabet is based on the Cyrillic script, which includes the whole Russian alphabet with the addition of a small number of characters and combinations for specific Sakha sounds. There is no academic and unified phonological transcription in the Sakha language. In the present paper, the Sakha sounds are given in the transcription developed by us with the account of their articulatory and acoustic qualities on the Latin script.

There are 20 vowels in the Sakha language – eight short (*u* /i/, *ү* /ÿ/, *ы* /ĭ/, *y* /u/, *э* /ä/, *ө* /œ/, *o* /o/, *a* /a/)and eight long vowels correspondingly (*uu* /i:/, *үү* /ÿ:/, *ыы* /ĭ:/, *yy* /u:/, *ээ* /ä:/, *өө* /œ:/, *aa* /a:/, *oo* /o:/), the latter being marked with double sounds, and four diphthongs (*uэ* /ie/, *үө* /yε/, *ыa* /ĭɜ/, *yo* /uo/).

The Sakha diphthongs consist of a combination of a narrow vowel with the wide one in the final position: *uэ* /ie/, *үө* /yε/, *yo* /uo/, *ыa* /ĭɜ/. Such diphthongs are sometimes called as "widening" diphthongs. The wide (last) vowel usually predominates the narrow one in the Sakha diphthongs in the length and force of its pronunciation. Therefore these diphthongs can also be called rising diphthongs, consisting of the main element in the final position and the accompanying – in the initial (Kharitonov 1947: 52).

Frequent use of long vowel and the structural quality of diphthongs are one of the distinguishing features of the Sakha language, which also present one the most major difficulties in the process of translation.

There 20 consonants in the contemporary Sakha standard language: *б* /b/, *г* /g/, *ҕ* /g/, *д* /d/, *дь* /ʤ/, *й* /j/, *ҥ* /j/ (nasal), *к* /k/, *л* /l/, *м* /m/, *н* /n/, *нь* /ɲ/, *ҥ* /ŋ/, *n* /p/, *p* /r/, *c* /s/, *h* /h/, *m* /t/, *x* /kʰ/, *ч* /ʧ/. Loan words from Russian also contain *в* /v/, *ж* /ʒ/, *з* /z/, *ц* /ts/, *ш* /ʃ/, *щ* /ʄ/ (Korkina 1982: 17).

The English language is an inflectional language. The English alphabet is based on the Latin script. Vowels consist of 12 monophthongs and eight diphthongs (Dikushina 1952: 46). Unlike the Sakha language, long vowels in English are not doubled in normal writing, but are followed by two vertical points only in transcription.

The system of English consonants consists of the following units: /b/, /p/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /h/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /l/, /r/, /j/, /w/.

Table 1. The Sakha vowel sounds

	Back		Front	
	non-labial	labial	non-labial	labial
wide	*a, aa*	*o, oo*	*э, ээ*	*ө, өө*
narrow	*ы, ыы*	*y, yy*	*u, uu*	*Y, YY*
diphthongs	*ыa*	*yo*	*uэ*	*YΘ*

Table 2. The vowel sounds of English

Front	Monophthongs	Diphthongs
	i: ι e æ	*iə ei εə ai au*
Back	*a: Λ o: o u: u*	*ou oi uə*
Mixed	*ε: ə*	

Therefore, there are two main factors, which complicate the translation of CSV from Sakha into English: firstly, they are sufficient differences in the phonetic-phonological systems of the languages, including different set and articulatory and acoustic features of monophthongs and diphthongs, and various norms of the phoneme representation in writing, secondly, it is the use of different scripts – Cyrillic and Latin.

Discussion

In Russian (Mikhalkov 1975) and English (Skrybykin 1995) translations of the epic "Nurgun Botur the Swift" (Oiunskii 2003) the issues of the CSV translation, represented mainly by personal names, are among the central. Some units have not yet received a proper translation, while the equivalence of the others is doubtful. Below proposed is the analysis of the existing translations of the Sakha CSV and our own variants (the spelling of the original names and their translations was retained) (Nakhodkina 2005: 103):

example 1. <u>Sakha</u> *Түөнүл Бөҕө* (Oiunskii 2003: 129) – <u>*Russ.*</u> *Тюэнюл Бэгэ* (Mikhalkov 1975: 100) – <u>*Eng.*</u> no translation.

Our variant: <u>*Russ.*</u> *Тенюл Беге* – <u>*Eng.*</u> *Tenul Bege*.

Example 2. <u>*Sakha*</u> *Куоҕалдьыма Куо* (Oiunskii 2003: 111) – <u>*Russ.*</u> *Куогалдьыма Куо* (Mikhalkov 1975: 85). – <u>*Eng.*</u> no translation.

Our variant: <u>*Russ.*</u> *Когалджима Куо*, или *Когалджима Прекрасная* (by analogy with a widely known name of fairy tales "Василиса Прекрасная" (Nakhodkina 2005: 106)) – <u>*Eng.*</u> *Kogaljima the Beauty.*

It was said above that in the pronunciation of the Sakha diphthongs the final element (nucleus) predominates over the initial (glide). Therefore in the examples 1 and 2 the Sakha letter and sound combinations *YΘ* /yε/ and *yo* /uo/ should be translated as *e* /э/ and *o* /о/ into Russian and *e* /e/ and *o* /o/ into English correspondingly. In this case we avoid misreading of the Sakha CSV by Russian and English-speakers, the languages of whom either do not have diphthongs, or only have the falling ones (English). This variant of the rendition of the Sakha diphthongs follows phonological compromise without changing significantly the original pronunciation of the Sakha words. Besides, this variant prevents the formation of the so-called "gaping" – the neighboring location of several vowels in

sequence, which hinders the distinct perception and pronunciation of a word, its euphony (Tomashevskii 2003: 89).

This way of rendition of the Sakha diphthongs, however, is not appropriate for all CSV in the epic. In the *olonkho* "Nurgun Botur the Swift" we found a number of personal names with a diphthong *уо* /uo/ in the beginning and the end. These are such names, as *Кyo, Уот, Луо, Уол*. In these cases phonemic reproduction of the Sakha names does not complicate their perception by a Russian or an English-speaker, and, therefore, all components of these diphthongs can be retained in the translation. The use of the other three difficult Sakha diphthongs *иэ* /ie/, *ыа* /ïɜ/, *үө* /уɛ/ in the same positions is not observed.

A small adjustment is also reasonable for the rendition of the consonant phoneme *дь* /ʤ/ (in example 2), which is hard-to-pronounce and does not occur in Russian. It can rendered into Russian by an accustomed combination «дж» by analogy with «джинн», «Джон», «Тадж-Махал», which exist in Russian. In the English language the Sakha *дь* /ʤ/ is close to the phoneme *j* /j/ (Nakhodkina 2005: 106-107).

The proposed rendition of the Sakha diphthongs *үө* /уɛ/ and *уо* /uo/ by their nuclei can also be applied to the culture-specific word *ыһыах* – a name of the Sakha summer solstice festival:

example 3. <u>Sakha</u> *ыһыах* (Oiunskii 2003: 372] – <u>*Russ.*</u> *ысыах* (Mikhalkov 1975: 291) – <u>*Eng.*</u> *Ysyakh* (Skrybykin 1995).

In example 3 the Sakha word *ыһыах* is also transliterated: every letter of the source language is exactly reproduced in Russian and English, misrepresenting the original pronunciation of the Sakha phonemes and name. That is why it would be better if the Sakha and Russian initial phonemes *ы* /ï:/ and *ы* /ы/ were rendered not by the English «*y*», which makes the word "heavy"

to read and pronounce, but by a "lighter" front phoneme *e* /e/. Taking into account the nature of the Sakha diphthongs, the diphthong *ыа* /ïɜ/ can be rendered by the Russian monophthong *э* /э/ and English *e* /e/.

Our variant:

<u>*Russ.*</u> *ысэх*

<u>*Eng.*</u> *esekh* (Nakhodkina 2008: 71)

Example 4. <u>Sakha.</u> **Иэрэҕэй** (Oiunskii 2003: 350) – <u>Russ.</u> **Иэрэгэй** (Mikhalkov 1975: 273) – <u>Eng.</u> no translation.

Our variant: <u>Russ.</u> Ерегей – <u>Eng.</u> Eregei (compare with **Ieregei**).

The Sakha diphthong *иэ* /ie/, like the diphthongs *уо* /uo/ and *үө* /уɛ/, consists of a glide and a nucleus in the final position, and therefore we only render its main component – its nucleus – the phonemes *e* /йэ/ into Russian and *e* /e/ into English. The voiced uvular consonant *ҕ* /g/, which does not have direct equivalents in Russian and English, we replace with the closest phonemes *г* /г/ and *g* /g/.

Long vowels, along diphthongs, make up one of the characteristic features of the Sakha language. In writing the length of vowels is marked by the doubling of a vowel. It is known, that such graphical marking of long vowels is typical for the early stages of a writing system development, which require further revision and improvement. That is why, as Alina Nakhodkina claims in the article "Translation of the Sakha Personal Names", a literal rendition of the Sakha vowel sounds should be avoided since it is not characteristic of the target languages – Russian and English (Nakhodkina 2005: 107). Below given are the examples:

example 5. <u>Sakha.</u> *Буура Дохсун* (Oiunskii 2003: 50) – <u>Russ.</u> *Буура Дохсун* (Mikhalkov 1975: 37) – <u>Eng.</u> *Buura Dokhsun* (Skrybykin 1995: 94).

Such translation is not preferable, in our mind, since the doubling of long vowels is

not characteristic of the Russian and English languages, and thus does not takes into account their norms. Moreover, the length of a vowel does not influence on the word stress, which is fixed in Sakha and usually falls on the last syllable. As a rule, the stressed syllable is expressed by the intensity and pitch of its vowel sound, not by its length (Kharitonov 1947: 56).

Our variant: <u>Russ.</u> *Бура Дохсун – <u>Eng.</u> Bura Dokhsun*.

The same is true to the following example:

Example 6. <u>*Sakha.*</u> *Моҕойдоон* (Oiunskii 2003: 471) – <u>*Russ.*</u> *Могойдоон* (Mikhalkov 1975: 376) – <u>*Eng.*</u> no translation.

Our variant: <u>*Russ.*</u> *Могойдон – <u>Eng.</u> Mogoydon*.

Conclusion

Our variants of rendition of diphthongs of in the Sakha CSV into Russian are mainly dictated by the absence of diphthongs in its phonological system, and into English – by the existence of structurally different diphthongs.

The rendition of the Sakha long vowel sounds by single phonemes into Russian and English are also explained by the absence of such graphical feature in the target languages.

In our mind, such ways of the translation of the Sakha CSV into Russian and English not only comply with their phonetic and phonological norms, but also contribute to the euphony of the translated words without misrepresenting their original pronunciation in Russian and English.

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Фонологические аспекты перевода якутского эпического текста на английский язык

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В статье рассмотрены вопросы перевода якутской безэквивалентной лексики на английский язык на уровне фонологии. Дано описание и сравнение фонологических систем якутского и английского языков, выделены наиболее сложные аспекты перевода якутских безэквивалентных слов на английский язык и предложены пути их решения с учетом фонологических различий данных языков. Примеры для анализа взяты из якутского героического эпоса олонхо "Нюургун Боотур Стремительный", записанного П.А. Ойунским.

Ключевые слова: эпос, безэквивалентная лексика, фонема, дифтонг, монофтонг, якутский язык, английский язык, фонологические нормы языка.