



WHO SAID IT WAS EASY?

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Language: Russian

The main difficulties of translating from English into Russian are related to the fundamental differences in social and political structure as well as the culture of the two countries. Due to these differences almost all of the UK terms and concepts covering national and local government, public sector, law, criminal justice system, police, social services, etc. do not have an equivalent in Russian. Particular examples of difficulties are as follows:

- **names of organizations and their departments**, like Children Services, Primary Care Trust, Foundation Hospital, Almos, etc. (including 'teams' and 'units' within them, like Duty&Safeguarding Team, Corporate Parenting Team, etc.);
- **job titles**, e.g. Offender Manager, Community Support Officer (by the way, such words as 'officer', 'caseworker', 'advanced practitioner', 'named nurse', 'support worker', 'counsellor', and many others do not have a Russian equivalent); as well as **professional titles**, like CIIA, FRCS, MRCVS, etc.;
- acronyms, like ALMO, PALS, KLWNBC, ISP, CPSS, etc
- references to **laws and regulations**, like 'Section 47', etc.
- due to cultural differences **many concepts** do not have an equivalent in Russian, e.g. "privacy", "community", "occupational therapy", "carer", "parenting", "bullying", "harassment", "affray", "diversity", "inclusion", "appointment", "partner" (meaning 'a spouse'), "stakeholder", "sustainability", "empowerment", "framework", etc.

Besides these semantic difficulties, there are also certain purely grammatical difficulties in translating from English into Russian, such as:-

- all parts of speech in Russian are **gender-sensitive**, e.g. you cannot translate an **adjective** "Dear" in a greeting in a letter if you don't know whether it's addressed to a man or a woman, just as it is impossible to translate, for example, such **nouns** as "friend", or "spouse" as there are different words for a male and female friend or spouse, or **verbs** in present perfect or past tense, like in a phrase "I have mentioned" or "I called";
- when translating the pronoun "you" one needs to know whether it is one person or more and sometimes if a letter is addresses to an adult or a person younger than 15-16.

As mentioned above, very many English terms do not have an equivalent in Russian. Besides the difficulties related to the socio-political and cultural differences, there are similar problems with **specialized translations** like stock markets, investment, banking, business, etc., which are obviously new for Russia where there was Soviet regime for almost 75 years up to the beginning of the 1990-s. In the period since *'Perestroika'* a process of language development on unprecedented scale has been going on. It is associated with dramatic social and cultural changes as well as opening of borders and advent of the Internet. A multitude of new words have appeared in the Russian language, partially by way of borrowing from English, and partially due to the emergence of new words among the Russian speakers. And this is an ongoing phenomenon. Naturally, these new words find their way into dictionaries very slowly, so that effectively there are not any reliable comprehensive and current dictionaries.

In the context of legal matters where “being precise” is crucially important one has to leave certain “untranslatable” terms in English in brackets and use a descriptive or explanatory translation based on definitions found in English glossaries and dictionaries, e.g. “community order” one would have to translate as “a court sentence which requires an offender to do unpaid work in the community”.

It is not always possible to find an equivalent for a proverb, in such cases you just translate its meaning. It is also difficult to translate idioms, marketing slogans, and particularly puns. Actually, puns are untranslatable, and one has to think of a new pun in Russian. But this area in general is particularly difficult for translation in any language and vividly demonstrates the contrast between “machine translation” and creative human translation, or “transcreation” which our work as translators really is.

A text can be confusing not just due to cultural/linguistic difference, but because of the style of the author, who uses arcane professional jargon, which makes it impossible to understand the actual meaning. The following phrase is an example of such a style (it is by a psychologist assessing parental capacity of a woman): “...*She is lacking reflective functioning, reflective taking of insight...*”. It would be hard to understand the meaning of it for a lay English speaking person, let alone translating it into another language.

Sometimes documents are written in a cumbersome bureaucratic style, which is also very difficult to translate, as in the following sentence from a document issued by a local authority: “*High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for the facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process*”.

Likewise highly specialized text can be very confusing. For example, here are a couple of sentences from an investment proposal: “*There is complete flexibility on asset allocation and by using their ‘macro’ outlook, thematic framework and output of in-house research analysts; the XXX strategy team*”.

can compare the relative attractiveness of different stocks, sectors, regions and asset classes in a dispassionate manner. While it does make use of derivatives for downside protection and income generation and periodically accesses desired alternatives through ETFs and other collectives, it has a very transparent investment approach". By the way, in this example there are problems with the usage of punctuation marks, which makes it even more difficult to translate.

It is highly unlikely that an average English speaker would understand the meaning of this text. In such cases a translator has first to try to decipher the meaning of each phrase and the sentence as a whole. It involves a lot of research which takes a very long time, because obviously one needs to understand the text to be able to render its meaning in another language.

It is very difficult to find an equivalent of a technical term in a foreign language when that terminology (or even technology that term falls into) doesn't exist in that language's country. In order to do this a translator has to study the subject in depth, i.e. to do a lot of research on the Internet to find out what terminology is currently used in a particular sector or industry. This is why translators, as a rule, specialize in one or two particular fields.

The main tip that I would like to give to my clients is to write clearly and concisely in plain English so that it will be easily understood by everyone. Avoid professional jargon and bureaucratic gobbledygook, and try to use as little highly specialized terminology as possible. Try to write in shorter, grammatically correct sentences, using appropriate punctuation. It would also help if you expanded abbreviations and acronyms at least once in your text.

To anyone who believes translating is an easy, straightforward job I would say that in fact it is a complex intellectual exercise, an art, a creative process that in contrast with machine translation involves 'transcreation' and 'localization', i.e. adaptation of the meaning to the current cultural environment of the target language country. Hence a professional translator not only needs to have advanced linguistic skills in both languages, deep knowledge of both cultures, broad general knowledge, but also needs to keep up-to-date with current language usage.