АУДАРМАТАНУ/ TRANSLATION STUDIES/ ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЕ

IRSTI 16.31.41
Research article

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KAZAKH PROPER NAMES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION: VARIABILITY AND RISKS OF NON-STANDARDIZED USAGE OF COMPUTER-ASSISTED TRANSLATION TOOLS

Abstract. The present study is dedicated to the analysis of the variability of Kazakh proper names, as well as the challenging tasks that arise from the non-standardized usage of computer-assisted translation tools. The authors of the research conducted a translation experiment based on a two-stage survey of respondents whose professional activities are connected with linguistics and translation. The survey was designed based on a thorough analysis of theoretical sources on various aspects of onomastics and digital technologies in translation. In the course of the research, extralinguistic issues were given consideration, including the trend of digitalization and the transition of the Kazakh language in the Republic of Kazakhstan to Latin script. The methodology of the research is based on the hypothesis of an interconnection between a high percentage of variability of Kazakh proper names in English translation and non-standardized usage of computer-assisted translation tools, as well as neural networks. The authors draw conclusions about the application of an interdisciplinary approach to the solution of relevant tasks of onomastics in the context of the theory and practice of translation.

Keywords: onomastics, proper names, translation, computer-assisted translation, machine translation.

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ISSN: 2616-678X. eISSN: 2663-1288

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Introduction

Contemporary technological trends have a profound impact on various aspects of translation, including its applied dimensions, research methodologies, and even state concepts. The present Concept for Artificial Intelligence Development for 2024–2029 period is having a positive effect on the direction of contemporary linguistic science in our state. Digitalizing the language and all achievements of the people of Kazakhstan will undoubtedly accelerate scientific development. It is important to note that a significant milestone in the digitalization of the Kazakh language is the transition to the Latin script, which commenced in 2017. Prior to this, Latin script-based equivalents of Kazakh proper names were predominantly encountered in English-language texts, either translated or authored by individuals from foreign countries. However, following the establishment of several steps and versions of a new Latin-script-based Kazakh alphabet, new variations of proper names have emerged in various spheres of life, ranging from business to culture.

The transliteration of proper names within the Kazakh language, in terms of transfer from Cyrillic to Latin script, is strictly regulated by the Institute of Linguistics named after Akhmet Baitursynuly. Nevertheless, in the context of contemporary globalization trends, the issue of transliteration of Kazakh proper names into English, as the language of international communication, has become increasingly pertinent and has generated interest in the field of onomastics.

The objective of this research is to address issues of onomastics from the perspective of contemporary digital methodologies. It is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine the translation industry without various computer-assisted translation tools. Even the state standard named «Translator», approved in February 2025, claims the necessity of having skills to master computer programs and digital technologies. It is hypothesized that the increasing popularity of computer-assisted translation tools may be a contributing factor to the rise in variations of Kazakh proper names transliterated into English. The tasks of the research are as follows: firstly, studying the relevance of this objective; secondly, developing the representative questionnaire; and thirdly, conducting a two-step survey to find out the possible connection between transliteration variations and non-standardized usage of computer-assisted translation tools.

Literature review

In the context of recent digitalization and globalization, onomastics has become one of the most important areas of modern linguistics. Various research projects in Kazakhstan and abroad study the correct representation of proper names. The role of English as the language of international science in this field is particularly important. Some researchers have even considered interlinguistic aspects on the example of several script systems and alphabets. In such cases, it is imperative to maintain a balance between phonetic precision and cultural adaptation, with this balance being contingent upon the text style and context (Omarova, Raissova, Kozhanova, 2025).

The issue of variability in Kazakh proper names has been previously examined. For instance, a corpus-based study of Kazakh exonyms has revealed a number of variations, which have been shown to require a balanced approach that considers both phonetic accuracy and cultural identity (Rysbergen, Rsaliyeva, Pashan, Schochenmaier, Arlen, 2025). The function of a proper name is of particular importance in a variety of industrial contexts, as it is not merely a sequence of characters, but rather a token that embodies specific functional characteristics.

Variations in proper names during the process of translation into foreign languages have the potential to give rise to a number of issues. These include the distortion of the image of the personality, the creation of the impression of an erroneous nature of a text, and the possibility of legal problems. This is due to the fact that anthroponyms serve the function of personality identification (Yermolovich, 2007).

In view of the modern onomastic system, the issue of standardizing proper names seems important, both for the internal needs of a society and for its availability to the international community (Medetbekova, Almakhan, 2021). In fact, it would be wise for linguists to consider all the particularities that can arise during the process of transliteration, while ensuring that it is not confused with transcription. It is worth noting that only transliteration is used for languages with different scripts (Naumova, 2013). This can make the elaboration of standardized guidelines more challenging.

A further significant element in the study of translation of proper names is the interdisciplinary approach, which necessitates the involvement of specialists from associated disciplines. For instance, the study of toponyms, in addition to their translation into English, necessitates the development of analytical principles and knowledge in disciplines such as history and geography. This is due to the complexity inherent in toponymy as a scientific field (Akizhanova, Omarova, Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2024). When dealing with the topic of anthroponyms in literary works, which may imply certain connections with the culture described, it would be advisable for a translator to have a comprehensive knowledge of many aspects, including culture awareness (Juzeleniene, Petroniene, Kopylova, 2016).

As this research examines the connection between onomastic issues and digital translation technologies, advancements in this area may be successful when taking into consideration sociolinguistic insights. Transliteration systems combining such important features as technical compatibility and cultural respect should be a result of collaboration among linguists, technologists, policymakers, and cultural representatives (Babayev, 2025).

A review of the extant literature indicates that, in the contemporary context of widespread utilization of computer-assisted translation tools, there is a compelling need to incorporate their interdisciplinary component into the study of onomastics and transliteration into English.

Methodology

Given that the methods of this study rely on the importance of the representativeness of proper names, as well as the possible challenges caused by the non-standardized use of computer-assisted translation tools, three main characteristics were derived. The following categories are employed for the presentation of the data:

The issue of information. It is important to note that certain pieces of information regarding individuals or entities represented by a transliterated proper name may be either lost or not displayed during a search in international databases for various purposes.

The issue of image representation. It may have an adverse effect on the image of the nation's culture in the international community due to the significant variations in the names of its famous people. This may appear erroneous to foreign audiences, even in cases where such transliterated proper names are variations.

The issue of property and copyright. It is conceivable that this could result in the perception of documents as illegitimate, particularly in relation to property, both tangible and intangible, as well as issues of relationships with individuals and the credibility of copyright. It is possible

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ISSN: 2616-678X. eISSN: 2663-1288

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that, in the case of Kazakhstan, there may be instances where official translations into English are required, such as for documents, certificates and scientific papers.

Based on this, the questionnaire was designed for two stages of the survey: the first stage was to be conducted offline during the scientific conference, and the second stage was to be conducted online among the international linguistic community. The issue of cultural representation of proper names has been revealed, and consequently, a decision was taken to base a questionnaire on the names of two distinguished Kazakh figures, Abai Qunanbaiuly and Akhmet Baitursynuly.

The first stage consisted of a single question, which asked respondents to translate the following names into English: Абай Құнанбайұлы (Абай Кунанбаев)/ Ахмет Байтұрсынұлы (Ахмет Байтурсынов). A total of 20 participants from the International Phylological Conference constituted the initial cohort of respondents in our survey. Subsequent to the initial hypothesis being proven, a further study was conducted in which computer-assisted translation tools were incorporated into the second stage questionnaire. This stage of the study involved a survey of 100 respondents, 96 of whom claimed to have a professional degree in philology.

Results and Discussion

The present paper is the first to research the connection between the variability of Kazakh proper names in English translation and the non-standardized usage of computer-assisted translation tools. As previously stated, the survey was divided into two sections: an offline and an online component.

The objective of both approaches was to demonstrate the existence of variations among the representatives of the scientific community. The initial stage of the survey was conducted during the International Online Conference organized by the Department of Translation Studies at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Therefore, it can be posited that all participants had prior experience in linguistic research and English translation. The participants were first presented with the report on the topic by the authors of this research and then requested to translate the names of two distinguished Kazakh personalities into English on a survey card in written form. It is noteworthy that the card containing the task included the names of Abai Qunanbaiuly and Akhmet Baitursynuly in both Cyrillic-script based versions, namely Kazakh and Russian. This would enable respondents to determine independently which variation they consider to be more accurate in English. The following table shows the results of the first stage, obtained from 20 survey cards.

Table 1. The results of the first stage of the survey, in which respondents translated the names into English.

№	Абай Құнанбайұлы (Абай Кунанбаев)	The number of respondents
	Abai Qunanbaiuly	7
	Abai Kunanbaiuly	4
	Abay Kunanbayuly	4
	Abai Qunanbayev	3
	Abay Kunanbayev	1
	Abay Kunanbaiuly	1
	Abay Kunanbaev	1

Ахмет Байтұрсынұлы (Ахмет Байтурсынов)

Akhmet Baitursynuly	9
Ahmet Baitursynuly	5
Akhmet Baytursynuly	3
Akhmet Baitursynov	2

Although the respondents had clearly gained experience in translation studies, this does not necessarily mean that they had worked on the translation of texts about these two prominent Kazakh figures. It is possible that the number of variations may be explained by their prior unfamiliarity with the spelling of these exact proper names in English, as well as their struggle to transliterate intuitively without consulting any modern technologies used for machine translation in general, or for transliteration in particular. Therefore, the subsequent stage of the survey sought to verify the following assumptions: would the number of variations be equivalent if respondents were to respond online, and would they utilize digital technologies for that purpose? Furthermore, the following questions were included in the list, in addition to metalinguistic information about the respondents and the primary questions, presented previously:

1. You are a researcher who needs to translate the proper name "Абай Құнанбайұлы" into English. Do you think its English equivalent should be different from the equivalent in the Kazakh Latin script?

2. Do you think that the English equivalents of proper names from countries that use the Cyrillic script should always be based on the national alphabets of these countries, or should they only use the English alphabet?

3. What do you do when you need to transliterate proper names into English, and you don't know how to write them precisely?

4. If you use a website for machine translation or transliteration, could you please name the website you use to transliterate proper names into English?

5. Do you think the various transliteration equivalents found on different websites (for example, "Abai", "Abay" and "Abaj") might cause problems for researchers?

6. If so, what kind of problems could those be, and how could we solve them?

We believe that this set of questions may provide a useful framework for assessing the attitudes of respondents from diverse cultural backgrounds towards issues of transliteration variability and their utilization of machine translation for this purpose. The countries under discussion are Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan. The choice was not an arbitrary one. Kazakhstan is currently in the process of transitioning from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet in its written language. Uzbekistan has already fulfilled this process with the adoption in 1993 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the introduction of the Uzbek alphabet based on the Latin script (Rafiqjon Zaripov Ergashboy Ogli, 2020). With regard to Belarus and Russia, it is important to note that both countries officially utilize the Cyrillic alphabet. It is evident that, historically, representatives from the countries of origin of the respondents have been obliged to translate proper names from Cyrillic into Latin script for the purpose of their representation in English.

For data analysis, the survey was deemed to be complete as soon as the number of respondents reached 100. Most of these respondents (62 individuals) represented universities in Kazakhstan. The respondents' experience in the linguistic field is also a contributing factor,

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ISSN: 2616-678Х. eISSN: 2663-1288

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thereby supporting the reliability of the results obtained. A significant proportion of the respondents (94 %) indicated that they possessed a degree related to the professional use of English, specifically in teaching, translation studies, or research. This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates that a substantial percentage of the respondents have expertise in a field directly related to English language proficiency.

It is noteworthy that the respondents, who possess the ability to transliterate from Cyrillic script to Latin at a professional level, as evidenced by their affiliation with distinguished universities, hold divergent opinions on the matter of whether the English equivalent of the name should differ from the transliteration into the Kazakh writing script.

You are a researcher who needs to translate the proper name "Абай Құнанбайұлы" into English.

Do you think its English equivalent should be different from the equivalent in the Kazakh Latin script?
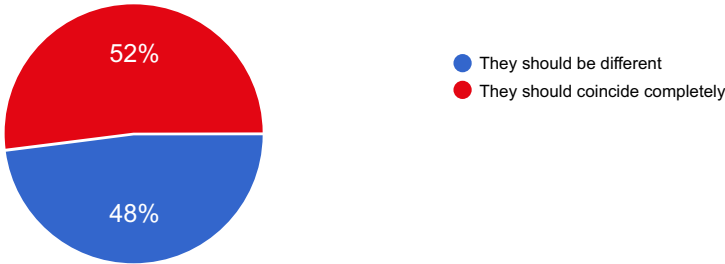
100 ответов

- They should be different
- They should coincide completely

Figure 1. The respondents' opinions on the question of equivalence.

However, the majority of respondents (52%) indicated that the English equivalent of the name and its spelling in Kazakh using new Latin script should coincide completely. A slightly smaller number of respondents, constituting 48 % of the sample, expressed the opinion that there is a necessity for distinction, on the basis that the transliteration into the Kazakh writing script will comprise diacritic signs and even letters that are not present in the English language. This finding suggests that a proportion of linguistic professionals within the community may still be undecided on this issue. The survey results demonstrate that there is no definitive answer among the respondents to the question of whether foreign proper names in English should be written exactly as they are written in the national languages of countries using Latin script, or whether their spelling should vary.

Furthermore, respondents were asked to transliterate the name of "Абай Құнанбайұлы" into English. It was evident that respondents from Kazakhstan demonstrated a high level of proficiency in dealing with this proper name, as the name of the great philosopher is known to everyone. They exhibited a comprehensive understanding of the appropriate search methods and the ability to accurately transliterate the name. This fact renders their answers even more intriguing for the purposes of our research, as the subsequent table displays the list of all transliteration variants proposed by the respondents in the survey. A total of 96 respondents submitted their respective versions of transliteration, although four of them indicated that they lacked the necessary proficiency in this skill.

Table 2. Transliteration variations of the name "Абай Құнанбайұлы" in English.

#	Variant of transliteration	Frequency out of 96
	Abai Qunanbaiuly	22
	Abai Kunanbaiuly	15

Abay Kunanbayuly	13
Abai Kunanbayuly	11
Abai Qūnanbaiūly	10
Abay Qunanbaiuly	7
Abay Kunanbaiuly	7
Abai Kunanbaiuli	4
Abay Kunanbayuli	4
Abay Qunanbayuli	1
Abay Qunanbayuly	1
Aabuy Kunanbuy-uly	1

The table shows that there are 12 different variations of this name and surname, which demonstrate some common tendencies. The variation of the name "Abai" is used 62 times, while "Abay" is chosen 34 times. It is worthy of note that the repetitive syllable "бай" is present in both the name and the surname and yet is not always translated in the same manner, even in the variant provided by one respondent. It is evident that a quarter of respondents, specifically 25 individuals, provided translations containing "-bay" in the name and "-bai" in the surname immediately following it. It may be indicative of respondents not taking into account any specific linguistic regulations but rather relying on digital resources and their extralinguistic background.

Although the possible connection between the predominance of the variation "Abai" over "Abay" and some extralinguistic factors is yet to be investigated in future research, its connection to computer-assisted tools may be revealed by our respondents' answers to the next question. We inquired as to the process they followed when transliterating proper names into English when they were unable to write them precisely.

The majority of responses focused on the use of various computer-assisted tools, which was confirmed by most respondents. The utilization of computer-assisted tools encompasses not only machine translation tools such as Google Translate and Yandex Translate, but also various transliteration tools and systems of artificial intelligence. The following diagram illustrates the resources that respondents utilise for the purpose of transliteration.

If you use a website for machine translation or transliteration, could you please name the website you use to transliterate proper names into English?
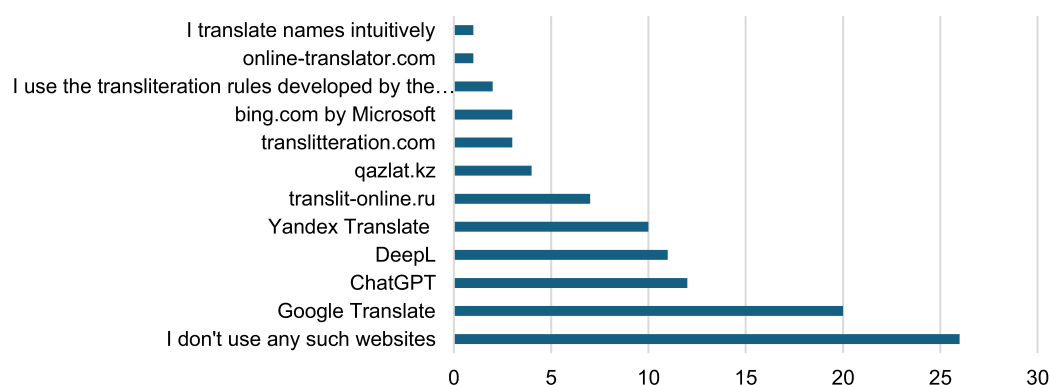

Figure 2. The list of computer-assisted translation tools provided by the respondents.

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It is evident that a mere 26% of respondents indicated that they do not utilise computer-assisted translation tools for the specified task. Conversely, the overwhelming majority of 74% expressed a favourable response, providing detailed descriptions of the specific digital tools employed. Subsequently, an analysis is conducted on the list of digital tools provided by the respondents to ascertain whether there is any variation in the transliteration of proper names. The following statistics in Table 3, which were provided in response to the preceding question, may perhaps explain the 12 different English translations of the proper name «Абай Құнанбайұлы», as previously illustrated in Table 2. It should be noted that only Kazakh language variants of the name were used to check the transliteration into English for the results in Table 3.

Table 3. Variations in proper names that occur when using the resources provided by the respondents.

#	Name of the resource	Абай Құнанбай-ұлы	Ахмет Байтұрсын-ұлы	Number of respondents
1	https://translate.google.com/	Abay Kunanbayuly	Akhmet Baitursynuly	20
2	https://chatgpt.com/	Abai Qunanbaiuly	Akhmet Baitursynuly	12
3	https://www.deepl.com/en/translator	Abai Kunanbayuly	Ahmet Baytursynuly	11
4	https://translate.yandex.com/	Abay Kunanbayuly	Akhmet Baitursynov	10
5	http://translit-online.ru/	Abaj Kunanbajuly	Ahmet Bajtursynuly	7
6	https://qazlat.kz/	Abai Qūnanbaiūly	Ahmet Baitūrsynūly	4
7	https://www.bing.com/translator/	Abai Kunanbayev	Akhmet Baitursynuly	3
8	https://www.translitteration.com/	Abai' Qunanbai'uly	Ahmet Bai'tursynuly	3
9	https://www.online-translator.com/	Abai Kunanbaevich	Akhmet Baitursynovich	1
10	https://sozdik.kz/ru/converter/	Abai Qūnanbaiūly	Ahmet Baitūrsynūly	-

Given that 74% of respondents claim to use them for the purpose of transliteration, and given the fact that the websites also provide variations in proper names, it can be assumed that there is a direct connection between these two factors. The responses to the following question appear to be of particular significance, given the issues of information, image representation and property and copyright that are presented in the methodology section of this work.

Do you think the various transliteration equivalents found on different websites (for example, "Abai", "Abay" and "Abaj") might cause problems for researchers?
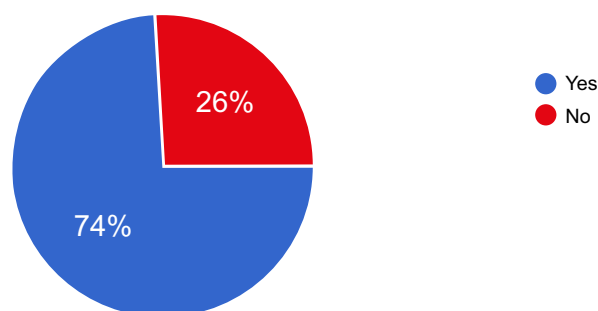
100 ответов

Figure 3. The percentage of responses to the question about possible problems caused by variations in proper names.

In addition to addressing the three primary issues, which may arise due to variations in Kazakh proper names in English, respondents were invited to provide their personal opinions on the subject. Regarding *the issue of information*, they claimed that this may make it difficult to find relevant articles on the topic. It may also cause difficulties in searching for and finding sources, as well as inconsistent citations and bibliographies. Furthermore, it can lead to confusion in cross-language research. Using different forms of names can cause confusion in references and bibliographies, which can affect the perceived credibility of the work.

In relation to *the issue of image representation*, respondents have expressed concerns that this may lead to confusion among foreign researchers, potentially resulting in the creation of duplicate identities for the same individual. This could consequently give rise to misconceptions and misunderstandings. Respondents also expressed concerns about *the issue of property and copyright*. They said that it would be difficult to prove later on which person's scientific work it belongs to. Inconsistent spellings across publications create confusion about identity and risk misidentification. Fragmented indexing in databases or libraries splits records, hindering access. Finally, the majority of respondents agreed that managing these issues thoroughly is crucial for rigorous academic work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that this study revealed a significant number of variations in the translation of Kazakh proper names into English using computer-assisted translation tools. The findings of the two-stage survey demonstrated that a significant proportion of contemporary researchers in the domain of linguistics frequently employ digital tools for the purpose of transliteration. This tendency may be indicative of the variability of proper names in texts translated into English. The digital transformation of numerous industries in Kazakhstan, particularly the field of science, underscores the significance of accurate representation of information within this emerging digital domain. It is therefore evident that issues of onomastics in the context of their proper translation into English become significant subjects of research.

The points are also substantiated by the issues of information loss, cultural image and property, credibility and copyright. These issues may be compounded by the variability of

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ISSN: 2616-678X. eISSN: 2663-1288

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Kazakh proper names in English translation, which may result in challenges. Research has demonstrated the existence of variability in proper names, along with the supporting rationale for standardizing equivalents of Kazakh proper names for use in English translation.

Contribution of the authors. This research was conducted by a group of authors, all contributing. L.A. Zadorozhnaya, A.Ye. Yerzhan was responsible for the literature review, the design of the research plan, the development of the questionnaire for both stages of the survey, and the processing of its results. A. Kutpanova contributed by providing a review of foreign literature, conducting a statistical analysis of the findings and developing the research plan methodology.

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ISSN: 2616-678X. eISSN: 2663-1288

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Қазақ онимдерінің ағылшын тіліне аударылуы: вариативтілік және автоматтандырылған аударма құралдарын стандартқа сай емес қолдану тәуекелдері

Аңдатпа. Зерттеу қазақ жалқы есімдерінің вариативтілігін зерттеуге, сондай-ақ автоматтандырылған аударма құралдарын қолдану барысында жалқы есімдерді аудару кезінде туындайтын проблемалық мәселелерді талдауға арналған. Зерттеу авторлары лингвистика және аударма саласымен кәсіби тұрғыда айналысатын респонденттер арасында екі кезеңнен тұратын сауалнама негізінде аударма экспериментін әзірлеп, жүзеге асырды. Сауалнама мазмұны ономастиканың әртүрлі салалары мен аудармадағы компьютерлік технологияларға қатысты теориялық дереккөздерді жан-жақты талдау негізінде құрастырылды. Зерттеу барысында сондай-ақ экстралингвистикалық сипаттағы факторлар, атап айтқанда, цифрландыру үдерісі және Қазақстан Республикасында қазақ тілінің латын графикасына көшу үрдісі ескерілді. Зерттеудің әдіснамасы қазақ жалқы есімдерінің ағылшын тілінде жазылуындағы вариативтіліктің жоғары деңгейде пайда болуы автоматтандырылған аударма бағдарламалары мен нейрондық желілерді стандартталмаған қолданумен өзара байланысты деген гипотезаға негізделеді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде авторлар аударма теориясы мен практикасы аясында ономастиканың өзекті мәселелерін шешу үшін пәнаралық тәсілді қолдану қажеттігі туралы қорытындыға келді.

Түйін сөздер: ономастика, жалқы есімдер, аударма, автоматтандырылған аударма, машиналық аударма.

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Казахские имена собственные в англоязычном переводе: вариативность и риски нестандартизированного использования инструментов для автоматизированного перевода

Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено вопросам изучения вариативности казахских имен собственных, а также исследованию проблемных вопросов, возникающих при переводе имен собственных с использованием инструментов для автоматизированного перевода. Авторы исследования разработали и осуществили переводческий эксперимент на базе двухэтапного опроса респондентов, чья профессиональная деятельность связана с лингвистикой и переводом. Контент опроса составлялся с учетом тщательного анализа теоретических источников по вопросам различных разделов ономастики и компьютерным технологиям в переводе. В ходе исследования также учитывались аспекты экстралингвистического характера, такие, как тенденция цифровизации и переход на латинскую графику казахского языка в Республике Казахстан. Методология исследования опирается на гипотезу о взаимосвязи появления высокого процента вариативности в англоязычном написании казахских имен собственных и нестандартизированного использования различных программ для автоматизированного перевода, а также нейронных сетей. Авторы пришли к выводу о необходимости применения междисциплинарного подхода для решения актуальных задач ономастики в контексте теории и практики перевода.

Ключевые слова: ономастика, имена собственные, перевод, автоматизированный перевод, машинный перевод.

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ФИЛОЛОГИЯ сериясы
ISSN: 2616-678X. eISSN: 2663-1288

2025
№4 (153)

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