Medical Writing in
RUSSIAN

From Russian to English and back again

Thanks to EMWA for raising this topic. Trying to capture the essence of medical writing in both Russian and English was a fascinating exercise for me. It wasn't easy, but the exploration of the issue itself proved very valuable.

On one hand, both languages share Indo-European roots, resulting in some similarities. This common ground makes understanding grammar and numerous concepts easier. Plus, the Latin origins of a vast number of many medical terms are a huge help when translating or writing medical texts.

Interestingly, in the field of clinical trials and drug registration there is still no universal translation for some terms in the Russian language and therefore even in Russian-language documents we use the English term, e.g. estimand (эстимана). What's more, some English abbreviations, such as GCP (Good Clinical Practice), GLP (Good Laboratory Practice), and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice), are so ingrained in our daily work that they're simply used as is.

Nevertheless, the differences are striking. Russian texts are consistently longer and more verbose than English. The average English word has five letters, while a Russian word usually has six or seven. English has thousands of three-letter words, while Russian only has about 300. Translating from English to Russian tends to expand the original text by between 9% and 25%. This is because translating a single English word often requires two, three, or even more words in Russian to accurately convey the meaning, even if it sacrifices brevity.

The structure of Russian text is also different. It tends to be less personalised, with more passive constructions, additional information, clarifications, and variations in word order. This contrasts with the fixed word order and conciseness of English. It's no surprise that the English writing of Russian authors often has a recognisable Russian flavour – it's a natural consequence of the language's inherent structure. This adaptation can be a real challenge, especially when you're working on multiple documents in both languages simultaneously.

Another key difference lies in the style of the text. In Russian, the purpose of the writing heavily influences the approach. Official regulatory documents, scientific articles, and everyday conversations all have drastically different styles, unlike in English. This means that for things like research protocols, scientific articles, or even a brief advertising note about a clinical trial in Russian, the style, terminology, and phrasing will vary. You really need to tailor your writing to the specific purpose of the text. However, I've noticed a trend in recent years towards a simplification of Russian-language regulatory documents, largely due to the harmonisation of document structure and content with international English-language guidelines.

This exploration has given me a deeper appreciation for the unique challenges and rewards of working with both languages in the world of medical writing.

The Russian language is considered one of the richest and most full of nuance. For medical writers, this is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it's a treasure trove of creative possibilities, allowing us to choose just the right word to convey a precise meaning. But on the other hand, it can sometimes influence our English, giving it a specific flavor that might not always be readily understood. Luckily, the shared regulatory environment in drug development, along with common terminology, helps bridge the gap. It allows us to communicate effectively, both written and verbally, with colleagues and authorities worldwide.

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