TRANSLATING FROM RUSSIAN

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Though it is essential for all scientists to keep in touch with work published in languages other than their own, this task probably presses more lightly on English-speaking workers than on others. This happy state of affairs is due to two main factors (apart from the large contribution made by British scientists themselves): (1) the enormous output of American research, and (2) the at least temporary decline in the importance of German as a scientific language and its replacement by English in the Scandinavian and other countries. In recent years, however, the problem of reading foreign languages has been raised in a new form by an increasing awareness of the number of publications in Russian; and, even if the Russian achievements in biology and medicine are less spectacular than in some other fields, the problem of Russian translation is likely to receive increasing attention.

There would seem to be three methods of tackling this problem: (1) the development of electronic translation, (2) the creation or expansion of a class of professional translators as distinct from working scientists, and (3) the provision of better facilities for the scientist who wishes to read Russian himself. There can be little doubt that electronic translation must be at least part of the solution, even if it does not completely replace the human translator, and the next five or ten years will probably see great advances in this direction. A good deal has already been done, and Booth, Brandwood, and Cleave (1958) have published an account of work done at the Birkbeck College. Recent numbers of the *L.L.U. Translation Bulletin*, published by the D.S.I.R., also give an account of work of this kind. A Russian project for machine translation from French into Russian was started in 1954, and the first translated sentence appeared in June, 1956. (It is an interesting speculation whether work on electronic translation, quite apart from its technical value, might not throw some unexpected light on fundamental problems in linguistics.) The expansion of the professional translator class is also likely to be a partial solution to the problem of Russian translation; but this is not a very easy solution, as in many scientific fields understanding the subject-matter may be just as formidable a task as understanding the language in which it is written. The third possibility is for the scientist to learn Russian, just as a generation ago he learned German. Without going into all the problems of either the professional or the amateur translator, one of the needs of both is a good Russian-English dictionary, and the publication of a Russian-English medical dictionary by Jablonski and Levene* makes it pertinent to review the present resources available.

The Russian translator is restricted to dictionaries meant for general use, many of which are excellent of their kind, or to the very small number of technical dictionaries or compilations of Russian words of which I find Callaham's (1947) *Russian-English Technical and Chemical Dictionary* the most useful. Carpovich's (1958) *Russian-English Biological and Medical Dictionary*,

with which I am less familiar, is also valuable, but its production in a photo-offset edition does not make for easy use. How does Jablonski and Levene's dictionary compare with these?

Criteria of a Dictionary

The value of a dictionary can be judged by the following criteria: (1) its clarity—that is, kind of type, size of print, quality of paper; (2) the accuracy of the meanings given; (3) the amount of information given in addition to the actual meanings of the words; and (4) the range of words chosen for inclusion. It must be made clear that these criteria are considered here, perhaps somewhat rashly, from the point of view of the amateur translator rather than that of the professional linguist. As regards clarity, Jablonski and Levene's work leaves nothing to be desired, and this question of clarity is of special importance in dealing with the Cyrillic characters in which Russian is printed. A comparison with Carpovich's book will convince the reader of the truth of this statement. There also seems no reason to doubt the accuracy of the meanings, and the very occasional words—for example, impuberal, non-tumoral, meninx—which look slightly strange would presumably look less so to American eyes.

The amount of information given in addition to the meanings of the words is a matter on which there is considerable room for difference of opinion. From the translator's point of view the extra linguistic information is usually not of great value; it makes the entries longer and more complicated and may add greatly to the size of the book. Even information on the aspect of Russian verbs, though useful, is often not indispensable in technical translation. There is therefore no serious complaint that Jablonski and Levene offer only the meanings of the words and an indication of the part of speech. There is, however, one piece of information which adds nothing to the length of the entry and is of the greatest value to the translator, and that is the stress or accent on the Russian words. Even if one is not attempting to acquire a speaking knowledge of Russian, one hopes to remember a number of the words looked up and hence to be able to look up fewer words with more experience. Most people fix words in the memory by remembering sounds (even if these are not the correct sounds) rather than visual images. If, therefore, stresses have to be given to different syllables it seems a great pity not to learn the correct stress from the beginning. The absence of stresses is a major defect in this dictionary, as it is also the most important defect in Callaham's dictionary. Many of the non-technical dictionaries are adequate in this respect.

The range of words included is perhaps the most important matter, and the one thing the translator desires more than any other is to find all the words he needs in one volume. It is undoubtedly far easier to use one larger dictionary than two smaller ones, and for scientific translation portability is not very important. The present dictionary falls down in this respect as it is meant specifically to supply only technical words of medical interest. It is true the authors indicate in the preface that the dictionary is intended to be used only in conjunction with a non-technical dictionary, but the fact remains that Callaham's dictionary, though only a little larger, gives most of the words, technical and non-technical, likely to be needed in dealing with medical and biological literature.

**Russian-English Medical Dictionary*, by Stanley Jablonski, and edited by B. S. Levene. Academic Press Inc., New York, 1958. 88s.

Types of Technical Words

But if a dictionary is meant to supply technical words it is perhaps fairest to judge it from this point of view. There are two types of technical words likely to be met with in Russian: (1) words of Slavonic origin, and (2) words of Western origin. The first group create the real problem. They are totally unfamiliar to the English reader, and they may not be included, or at least their technical meaning not included, in ordinary dictionaries. The value of a dictionary in this respect can only be judged by using it, and in a very short trial the following absentees were noted: *исчерченный* (striated, referring to muscle), *подрытый* (undermined, referring to the edge of an ulcer), *вставочный* (intercalated or internuncial, referring to nerve fibres), *посев* (culture, referring to micro-organisms), *тяж* (tract or column in neurology), *неживой* (non-living). Under *бляшка* the meaning motor end-plate was not included, and *окумование* is rightly given as meaning encystment, but the additional important meaning "encapsulation" referring to sensory end-organs was not found. These are all words likely to be frequently encountered, and it is precisely words of this kind which give most trouble to the translator. It is also unlikely that I happened to note all the important omissions in a few preliminary trials.

The second group of Russian technical words, and fortunately a very large one, comprises those borrowed from Western science. Once the Cyrillic alphabet has been mastered these words present almost no difficulty, provided the reader is familiar with the English equivalents—for example, *адреналин* (adrenaline), *антибиотик* (antibiotic), *гликоген* (glycogen), *комплемента* (complement), *перифлебит* (periphlebitis), *пикротоксин* (picROTOXIN), *рефлекс* (reflex). It is these words which the compilers of the dictionary have concentrated upon, with what might seem to be a considerable waste of time and effort. On almost every page at least half the words listed and often more could be guessed without any difficulty by anyone with only the smallest experience of Russian, but with a technical knowledge of the subject. It is true that words of this kind would be more useful to the professional translator with little technical knowledge, but, even so, more concentration on the Slavonic technical words would surely have been far more useful.

Another serious criticism is the system of listing many of the adjectives and adjectival expressions. These are given as sub-entries under the nouns with which they might be associated, and may or may not be given in their own alphabetical position. The authors explain the system in the introduction, in which they say, "Compound terms are alphabetized by nouns with secondary arrangement of modifying adjectives." This means in practice that the adjective *криминальный* (criminal) is not given under K but is given as a sub-entry under *аборт* (abortion). Similarly, *описательный* (descriptive) appears as a sub-entry under *анатомия* (anatomy) and has no entry of its own.

In other cases multiple entries are given. Thus *межреберный* (intercostal) is given at least five times, as a sub-entry under *артерия* (artery), *нерв* (nerve), *мышца* (muscle), and *пространство* (space), as well as under its own entry. It is very difficult to understand the advantage of this system, and it is presumably tacitly assumed by the compilers that the adjective "criminal"

will only be used to qualify the word "abortion," and the adjective "descriptive" to qualify only the word "anatomy."

Problem of Abbreviations

Russian scientists, like their colleagues elsewhere, use a large number of abbreviations, and these can present formidable problems to translators. The dictionary makes a very real effort to cope with this problem by including a very large number of abbreviations, and this is undoubtedly a very useful feature. I have found no obvious omissions on looking up a few familiar abbreviations, and the zeal with which abbreviations have been tracked down by the authors is surely indicated by ЗАКВОДГЕО, which stands for Transcaucasian Branch of the All Union Scientific Research Institute of Water Supply, Canalization, Hydraulic Structures, and Hydrogeological Engineering.

While this dictionary will fill a number of gaps in our present needs it still fails to provide the complete answer to the translator's prayer, and if there are any enterprising organizations or individuals with such a laudable project in mind they should be encouraged to proceed with their work in the knowledge that they have not yet been forestalled.

REFERENCES

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Nova et Vetera

MANIPULATION OF THE SPINE

In a long paper published in four numbers of the Norwegian Medical Association's journal¹ Dr. Eiler H. Schiøtz, an industrial medical officer in Oslo, has discussed manipulation of the spine from a medical and historical point of view. The paper gained him the Lederle award. He found that diseases of the locomotor system accounted for about 17% of all absentees from work, and in studying the prevention and treatment of these diseases he became interested in the history of manipulations of the spine.

In this paper he gives a fascinating account of the manipulation-traction treatment of the spine from the earliest known sources of information up to the most recent publications on the subject. The detailed description of the most ancient methods is well illustrated. The great mixture of sense and superstition which marks the treatment in many countries is presented in a most readable way. Bone-setters, osteopaths, and chiropractors are exposed in a factual manner. The doctor's opinion on manipulation during the last decade is also described. The author makes an effort to explain the basis of how manipulation works, and lists indications and contraindications for this treatment and how it has been carried out.

The paper is an extremely thorough and sober study of the problem. One can only agree with the author that, although manipulation of the spine is sometimes indicated, too often exact indications are missing because no exact diagnosis has been established. We are in what he calls "a vertebral no-man's-land." The two hundred and fifty references would be most useful for any student of this problem.

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¹ Schiøtz, E. H., "Manipulasjonsbehandling av columna under medisinsk-historisk synsvinkel," *T. norske Laegeforen.*, 1958, 78, 359, 429, 946, 1003.