LETTERS

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Russian Scientific Information

The importance of keeping abreast of Russian scientific information cannot be questioned, and the article by Ralph E. O'Dette, "Russian translation" [*Science* **125**, 579 (1957)], emphasizing this point was very informative indeed. However, O'Dette's plans for translating complete U.S.S.R. journals seem to me to be too costly and unnecessary in the light of certain facts not mentioned in the article.

Most U.S.S.R. journals have English tables of contents, and several have good English summaries—for example, the journal *Voprosy Virusologii* (*Problems in Virusology*), six issues a year, one issue 60 to 65 pages. The first issue of 1957 contains about 1500 English words (!), and the annual subscription rate is $2. Several other U.S.S.R. journals have similar English contents and summaries—for example, Leningrad University series: *Fiziki i Khimii, Mikrobiologia, Antibiotiki, Voprosy Meditsinskii Khimii, Patologicheskaia Fiziologia i Experimentalnaia Terapia,* and so on. Furthermore, there seems to be a trend toward more journals' doing likewise, probably to encourage circulation in English-speaking countries. To completely translate these journals—that is, by National Institutes of Health-awarded contracts, would be time consuming, and the cost would be extremely high, especially when one considers the diluted quality of the work coming out of the U.S.S.R.

It seems to me that contents lists and summaries are usually informative enough. Where the translation of a complete article is desired, existing translating agencies, government and commercial, can do this without undue delay and, in the long run, at less cost for all concerned.

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Heino Luts' point is, of course, a sound one, and it is one which we try to keep constantly in mind in planning. We are aware of about 85 Russian journals that presently carry English titles, abstracts, or both. This is a much better situation than existed a year or two, or even 6 months, ago.

Complete translation of a Russian journal is "economical," in the strictest sense, only if enough of the journal is of sufficient interest to enough scientists to sustain a subscription list to the translation, thus reducing or eliminating (it is hoped!) government subsidy.

The prices of government-subsidized translated journals are such that a year's subscription is about equal to the commercial cost of translating, to order, one or two average papers. By trying to select only the very best Russian journals, the professional societies with whom we work hope to prejudice the odds in favor of a researcher's wanting more than one or two papers translated in full during a year.

There should be the widest possible awareness of the English-language information published by the Russians. This simplifies our problem to some extent, but English titles or abstracts of Russian papers serve the same purpose as English titles or abstracts of English papers. An abstract or a title is sufficient only if it is enough. If one wishes to read an entire Russian paper and does not read the language, one must generally obtain a translation.

If the translated journals become self-sustaining, we will take this as an indication of acceptance by scientists. If, after 3 years or so, the subscription list to any one journal is still very small, we will probably take this as an indication that we should not continue to support the translation of that journal.

In essence, Luts and I are both right; which one is the most right depends on the subject matter, the need for information, the quality of particular journals, availability and price of "to order" translation, and other similar details.

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Transabdominal Amniocentesis

I should like to point out a problem in ethics involved in a recent paper by Parrish, Lock, and Rountree [*Science* **126**, 77 (1957)]. The authors report on 50 cases of transabdominal amniocentesis in normal pregnant women. Mention should be made of the disregard of patients involved in trying this procedure on these cases in view of the high incidence of congenital abnormalities following amniocentesis in mice reported by Trasler *et al.* [*Science* **124**, 439 (1956)]. Although no fetal trauma was reported, this was an experiment, and the result might have come out the other way. Were the patients aware of the dangers?

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In response to Lucille Morowitz, who questioned the ethics involved in our performing transabdominal amniocentesis in normal pregnant human beings [*Science* **126**, 77 (1957)] after Trasler *et al.* [*Science* **124**, 439 (1956)] had reported congenital malformations in mice following a similar procedure, we would like to offer the following considerations.

First, Rivett [*Am. J. Obstet. Gynecol.* **52**, 890 (1946)] did not observe amniocentesis harmful to the mother or child in 50 human cases of polyhydramnios, nor did Dieckmann and Davis [*Am. J. Obstet. Gynecol.* **25**, 623 (1933)] note any deleterious effects produced by the procedure in 25 normal human patients. Second, our work was completed during 1955, before the publication of Trasler's report. Also, Trasler's work was done on mice, which have two uterine horns accustomed to multiple pregnancy, in contrast to the single uterine segment of human beings in which a single pregnancy usually develops. Perhaps here we have an example of the inapplicability of the results of animal experiments to the results obtained in human beings. Third, the nature of the test was explained carefully to each patient, after which written permission was obtained to perform the test.

Reports in the literature and our own results do not seem to indicate that transabdominal amniocentesis is a dangerous operation in human beings; however, further evaluation is necessary before the procedure can be recommended for general use.

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EQUIPMENT NEWS

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■ DELAY GENERATOR consists of a trigger generator, a delay generator, and a regulated power supply. The trigger generator furnishes a standard negative pulse