

# Letters

## Russian Transliteration

The two articles in *Science* [129, 1111 (1959); 130, 482 (1959)] about Russian transliteration end with a correctly stated but, for scientists, somewhat disappointing view—"that a universally accepted solution is not yet at hand."

Razran rendered a service in bringing up this problem in *Science*. Unfortunately his "new system" adds to the prevailing confusion since he neglects fundamental aspects in compromising between transliteration and transcription. The inadequacy of his "complete and uniform transliteration of Russian" was widely demonstrated and justly criticized in *Science* from four different sides. After studying the critics' comments and Razran's reply, we have to realize that our objective in transliteration is to reproduce a Cyrillic script with letters of the Latin alphabet. Transliteration must be unambiguous, accurately reconvertible, workable, and as simple as possible. It must be admitted that none of our present systems of transliteration meets these requirements. While Fabergé, and London and London advocate in *Science* that the system of transliteration of the Library of Congress be maintained with very minor changes, Hamp and Ray have suggested more decisive alterations to improve the same system. These suggestions should be given due consideration because an improvement is mandatory, and it is advantageous to modify a prevailing system instead of devising an essentially new one.

It is, of course, very important that only one system be adopted, although this is beyond our control. Also, the new system should be acceptable to people in Western Europe (the French, the Germans, the Italians) who use the Latin alphabet, and even to Russians, who frequently transliterate names. If by "transliteration" is meant a system to indicate the pronunciation of Russian words, naturally separate systems would have to be adopted for French-, German-, Italian-, and English-speaking people. This would certainly be disadvantageous.

Transliteration of Russian is a necessity. It is feasible to attain one system acceptable at least to scientists if our aim is not utopistic. I feel that *Science*, by publishing discussions on the subject, could contribute much to solving this problem without "tinkering forever with Russian transliteration." I agree gladly with Razran, that a "greater and speedier effort to achieve unity is needed," but our goal and our methods must remain realistic.

I am grateful to all those who have demonstrated correctly our inadequacies and our requirements. As one who is neither a native nor a linguist but who must, however, frequently use transliteration, I would appreciate learning of any further development for improving our present practices. In my opinion we Americans, leaders in many fields, have the moral responsibility for developing an improved transliteration of Russian.

GEORGE SUSICH

*Pioneering Research Division,  
Quartermaster Research and  
Engineering Center,  
Natick, Massachusetts*

As was stated in the two articles under discussion, the system of Russian-English transliteration which I proposed differs only slightly from that used by the Joint Slavic Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, on the one hand, and from the system of the Consultants Bureau and of the Pergamon Institute in their numerous translations of Russian scientific periodicals and monographs, on the other. It is thus difficult to see how what is in essence an attempt to bring together two close and widely used and authoritative systems is a "new system" that "adds to the prevailing confusion." Moreover, in view of Susich's concern for adoption of a system that the Russians may also use, I should like to say that I have recently checked a wide variety of Russian-English translations done in the Soviet Union and find their system of transliteration to be even closer to what I propose: *Belskii* instead of *Belskii* or *Belskyy*, *Vorobyov* instead of *Vorobëv*, and even *Khrushchov* instead of *Khrushchev*. Or, in other words, the transliteration systems of the three main agencies directly involved in Russian-English translations and abstractions—the Consultants Bureau and the Pergamon Institute in the physical and biological sciences (Consultants gave up the system of the Library of Congress in January 1959), the Joint Slavic Committee in the human and social sciences, and the Russians themselves—are now quite close to each other, with only very small differences, which most probably could be ironed out through a conference (I would prefer an experiment but would settle for a conference). The criticisms of my transliteration proposals which Susich considers just, and which I consider mostly irrelevant, apply to the three systems no less than to my proposals.

The basic considerations of the pragmatics of Russian-English transliteration should really not be difficult to comprehend. They revolve, first, around the

realization that language is spoken even when it is read and that the current accelerated increase in the number of Russian names and terms in American [English] science and letters necessitates communicative-auditory discussions in the classroom, laboratory, conference room, and elsewhere; that is, the transliteration needs to provide in some way for constant approximation in pronunciation. Of all the critics, Hamp seems to be the only one to recognize this need. Second, there is the consideration that Russian, unlike English, is primarily a "phonetic" language, so that with only some effort the need to approximate pronunciations can be met through graphic transliteration, and that while it is true that the graphic desiderata become thereby somewhat forced and complicated, the outcome is nevertheless preferable to having two separate systems, one for graphic purposes and one for purposes of approximative pronunciation. The fact that the Consultants-Pergamon pure graphic transliterations differ but little from the Joint Slavic Committee transliterations, whose stated aim "is to approximate Russian sounds," is obvious objective evidence for the position taken. Susich "agrees gladly" with me that "a greater and speedier effort to achieve unity [uniformity] is needed" but says that "our goal and methods must remain realistic." He, however, is not realistic when he thinks of what should be done without considering or realizing what could be done; it is not just a matter of fiat.

GREGORY RAZRAN

*Queens College, Flushing, New York*

## Tax Deduction for Charity

The tax-deduction stand of William J. Martin [*Science* 130, 1435 (1959)] seems open to attack. The 10-percent deduction is set up on the assumption that a certain percentage of one's income is given to charity. If one contributes this amount or less, it is profitable to use the standard deduction. The person who does this is given his 20-cent tax rebate for contributing an amount to charity all or part of which he may have just pocketed, tax free; the less he gives, the more he gains. The dollars that Martin gives away below the amount allowed by the standard deduction are less-than-80-cent dollars and become 100-cent dollars only when he gives away more than his standard deduction will cover; in this case, elementary economics suggests that he make out a long form.

CANDIDA F. FRENKING

*Textile Research Journal,  
Princeton, New Jersey*