
Will Perestroika Open Soviet Science's Doors to the English Language?

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In the previous issue of *The Scientist* (Feb. 19, 1990), we devoted a sizable portion of editorial space to the international science community's golden opportunities and potential pitfalls stemming from the Soviet Union's dramatic policies of perestroika and glasnost.

In that issue, physicist Sidney Drell poignantly discussed his friend Andrei Sakharov, who—with his dedication to intellectual freedom and open communication among nations—must be regarded as a prime mover toward the great reforms we are now witnessing in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Concerning the improvement of communication between East and West that Sakharov persistently encouraged, it is appropriate that we in the science community consider some informational and linguistic changes that could significantly elevate and enrich the level of dialogue among researchers the world over. These changes entail, simply speaking, the need for Soviet scientists and publishers to, at long last, open their doors to the English language.

Consider the proceedings of the USSR Academy of Sciences—*Doklady Akademii Nauk*. This jour-

nal was originally published in French, but since World War II only has appeared in Russian and does not even contain abstracts or summaries in French or in English, which by now must be considered the international lingua franca of science. Even the French Academy of Sciences has recognized the need to include English abstracts in its *Comptes Rendus*. Apparently, the significant change in spirit going on within the Soviet Academy these days has yet to affect this policy.

Another indicator that perestroika has caused little change in Soviet journals is the matter of author's addresses. Each year thousands of articles are published in Soviet journals without them. One reason for this, we are told, is that so many of the authors are connected with military or other types of classified research. But, to me, there is a strange ambivalence in this: Why bother to publish at all if the authors are not accessible to discuss their work?

These days, supplying reprints is especially important in the Third World, where few libraries receive Soviet journals. But if the articles contain neither English abstracts nor author addresses, what use can they

possibly be to the inspired scientist? On the other hand, the truly inspired scientist is likely to find a way to get an article translated, and he or she will also find a way to locate the author. So what is the purpose in tantalizing researchers in the first place by withholding information that is ultimately obtainable?

Fortunately, there is some movement in the right direction. At least one new Soviet journal, *Biomedical Science*, a joint venture of a British firm and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, is written entirely in English. Its appearance may be a harbinger of things to come. And in a recent letter, the Soviet physicist Sergei Kapitsa tells me that the newly reinstated Physical Society of the USSR aims to launch a number of new publications, and, in Kapitsa's words, "some physicists

have suggested publishing a *Journal of Soviet Physics* in English so as to directly communicate with our colleagues abroad." Good news, indeed!

But why stop there? Why not transform all existing cover-to-cover originals into translation journals? The Soviet and Western publishers involved have much to gain from such a move, not to mention the authors and hard-pressed science libraries. Alternatively, the English translations and the original Russian versions could be published simultaneously. To accomplish this, of course, translators and authors need to be accessible to each other via fax, electronic mail, or telephone—but with a mix of perestroika and up-to-date technology, this is now within our reach. ■