

## Journal des traducteurs Translators' Journal

**Reifler, Erwin (project director). Linguistic and Engineering Studies in the Automatic Translation of Scientific Russian into English. [No continuous pagination (approx. 700pp.)] University of Washington Press, 1958. \$10.00**

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¶ **A Phrase and Sentence Dictionary of Spoken Russian : Russian-English, English-Russian.** vi. + 573pp. Dover, 1958. [\$2.75]

¶ **A Phrase and Sentence Dictionary of Spoken Spanish : Spanish-English, English-Spanish.** iv + 513pp. Dover, 1958. [\$1.75]

The two works here reviewed are Dover's reprints of War Department Technical Manuals TM 30-944 and TM 30-900 respectively — thus the non-mention of the authors, who are obviously, in each case, trained linguists and undeserving of such anonymity. Both dictionaries are constructed on the same principle, namely, that of linguistic reality: words are presented not in isolation but, in almost every case, as a part of a phrase or sentence in which the word characteristically occurs. These are not, to be sure, the first bilingual dictionaries to use illustrative phrases; but they are, to the reviewer's knowledge, revolutionary in using the phrase as the point of departure, and as such, they mark the first substantial break with the word-equals-word myth since the beginnings of bilingual lexicography — that is to say, since the mediaeval glossary. Let us hope it is applied to many more pairs of languages. Both works are also provided with useful appendices covering geographical terms, money, holidays, signs and food and dishes; the Russian one also has weights, abbreviations and special Soviet terms, the Spanish, an appendix of "useful expressions." Each section of each dictionary is preceded by a grammatical summary, refreshing for its new (viz., structural) approach. And both are a must for libraries and students of the languages concerned.

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Since the birth of structural linguistics in the latter Twenties, more and more applications have been found for the established hypothesis that language consists of **codifiable** units, not only in its phonology and grammar but to some degree in its lexicon as well. The dramatic revolution in language teaching methods, brought to public attention in connection with the intensive courses sponsored by the armed forces, has been one of these. Another, far less publicized but perhaps of greater long run value, has been the recording by anthropologists, in objective and unambiguous form, of the languages of primitive peoples, many threatened with extinction. It would seem but a short step from the concept of **codifiability** to the idea of using an automatic **codifier**; but it was not until nearly 1947 that Booth and Weaver (University of London) conceived the possible applicability of electronic computers to translation. Their ideas found their first sound support at M.I.T. (notably from Bar-Hillel), and in 1950 Erwin Reifler (editor of the present collection of reports) began active work on the problem of machine translation. Support from the Rockefeller Foundation was forthcoming, and today there are numerous fulltime researchers in the field. The U.S. Air Force, in particular, has sponsored several projects, including the University of Washington one here reported on. Work continues also in Great Britain, in France and, according to a report by Miss Sonya Machelson, of the Library of Congress, some seventy-nine institutes are engaged in machine translation research in the Soviet Union (New York Times, Sept. 17, 1959). The University of Washington report, while indispensable for the specialist's library, contains, besides Dr. Reifler's outline of the project and Dr. Micklesen's procedural report, little for the general reader, unless one count Micklesen's interesting appendices I and II, setting forth the linguistic problems involved, both of which have appeared elsewhere. Several articles are also devoted to the engineering aspects of mechanical translation. A closing remark: the proponents of machine translation do not foresee the likelihood of mechanically translating, say, a novel by Tolstoi. Their modest objectives relate, for the present, only to the translation of technical matter. Literary translation lies beyond the point of diminishing returns, for too many extralingual factors enter into play. The human translator need, therefore, have no fear of losing his livelihood — if only because he is cheaper.

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