

# Lost in Translation Across the Iron Curtain: Case Study of the Cold War (Mis)translation of *Naukometriya*

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The presentation researches the peculiarities of Cold War scientific translation based on the case study of the English (mis)translation of a seminal Soviet work which inspired the formalization of scientometrics – a discipline concerned with measuring how scientific information flows are organized. Written by Vasily Nalimov and Zinaida Mulchenko, *Naukometriya* was published in the USSR in 1969. Its influence reached not only the Soviet scientometric community, but also the Western one, being repeatedly praised by an American pioneer in the field, Eugene Garfield.

Originally written in Russian, the work was translated in 1971 by the Foreign Technology Division (FTD) of the US Air Force with the use of an early machine translation (MT) program called Systran. The American Cold War MT project was rooted in the ambition to peek behind the Iron Curtain, deterring national security risks by means of gaining insight into Soviet developments in science and technology. Therefore, the *skopos* (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014), or the purpose, of the translation was, as one of the FTD directors later stated, timely creating a product meant “for information only” (Vasconcellos & Bostad, 1992), not for publication. Yet, the MT version was soon disseminated, never replaced by an adequate translation.

Bringing together the diverse toolkits of both translation studies and social studies in the history of science, the authors argue that the poor quality of the only available English translation contributed to the diminished international visibility of the original Soviet work, misrepresenting Nalimov and Mulchenko, likely marginalizing their input into world science, and dispelling the idea of scientific cooperation across borders and above language barriers.

To support their argument, the authors performed a Translation Quality Assessment of the FTD document, working within the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) (Lommel et al., 2014) framework. Within the corpus consisting of all paragraphs containing one of the three central concepts of the book (*наукометрия/scientometrics*, *незримый коллектив/invisible collective*, and *информационный поток/information flow*), they identify two major areas which could potentially be distorted by the erroneous translation: authorial credibility and conceptual domain. Analysis shows that the end product is overly convoluted, at times non-sensical, which requires more cognitive load in processing by readers and discredits the authors’ expertise. Moreover, certain crucial terms are mistranslated, engendering conceptual mismatch between the English version and the original Russian text.

To further contextualize their findings and understand the role of proper scientific translation and publication in this particular case, the authors additionally refer to extensive archival material obtained from the Science History Institute in Philadelphia. Correspondence between Nalimov and Garfield, who claimed the role of his usher into the Western academic world, provides a glimpse into how they viewed the problem of translation and its place within scholarly communication.

All in all, the presentation makes use of an interdisciplinary methodology, scrutinizing the case of *Naukometriya*’s (mis)translation, and its subsequent distorted emergence in the West, to draw attention to the issue of how the figure of the author and their concepts can be misconstrued in translation.

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